



# Being Available, Becoming Student Kind: A Nurse Educator's Reflexive Narrative

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BEING AVAILABLE, BECOMING STUDENT KIND: A NURSE EDUCATOR'S  
REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2014

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**Abstract**

This thesis is a story of how I came to construct and illuminate a reflexive narrative as a journey of self-inquiry and transformation towards personal realisation. It shares a view of reflection as lived in being and becoming a reflective nurse educator in higher education. My narrative draws upon, auto-ethnography, critical social theory and hermeneutic perspectives. Johns (2010) six dialogical movements have been used to give structure to my narrative. Nineteen reflections generate the reflexive narrative in a hermeneutic spiral, as each text informs the other along the journey. Insights become clearer through guidance, dialogue, and engagement with the literature.

Early reflections show anxiety, emotional distress and entanglement as I tried to solve student problems. Maternalism influenced my approach to being with distressed and struggling students. Gradually these feelings give way to being available, becoming student kind as an enabling relationship with students. Becoming student kind is framed through my adaptation of the *Being Available Template* (Johns 2013). It is realised through; listening, presence, caring, empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence. Poise, a self-management practice ensures that personal concerns and tensions do not hinder my relationships with students. Mindfulness expressed as spirituality sustains this process. This path to becoming student kind creates a learning space for student growth and development. In so doing, students are enabled to enter into a nurse patient relationship through being available. I express my empowerment through a dialogical voice, transforming my practice with individual students, in the classroom and beyond. Understanding the tensions within the complexity of university culture influencing nurse education, informs collaboration with colleagues towards a shared vision of nurse education.

I turn to reflect on a journey of constructing a reflexive narrative. Five stepping stones for dialogue in advancing guided reflection as a foundation for nurse education are offered. My inquiry weaves a story of reflection as testimony to a fusion of practice and theory. I reveal practice wisdom, informing my day to day work in being available becoming student kind in relationships with students. I explore the contribution to knowledge, my practice and future research, considering the strengths and challenges therein.

### **Author's declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Margaret M. Graham

Signature:

Date: 13/10/2014

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## Acknowledgements

It takes a long time to write a thesis. It has taken many physical and metaphorical journeys and there are many people to thank.

Director of Studies, Professor Christopher Johns, who first saw possibilities in my work, for a vision of reflexive narrative, for guidance towards making every day at work special. Early supervisors; Dr. Amanda Price, Dr. April Nunes. Later, Dr. Nasreen Ali for feedback and conversations with Dr. Uvanney Maylor and Dr. Saul Kenworthy.

Our reflective community; Lou Jarrett and Maria Fordham and Lei Foster, from the very beginning, lighting the path for us. Adenike, Justin, Colin, Sylvina, and Tony what a journey.

My family; Dan, *anam cara*, we have travelled many roads with our precious family. Bringing me to Shannon airport at dawn, on the days when I felt disheartened, waiting when I landed late in the night. Sarah, for knowing when to send texts, for our Thursday night dates. Andrew, navigator, co-pilot, for the music and company on the way to work. Robbie, for the quiet wit, and chat on the way to matches.

My parents, Nuala and Jim, for their wisdom, and love for all of us. My brother, Gerry, Jude, Jack, Molly and Anna; my sister Vera, a wise owl from afar, Lance, Moya and Aoife, for the conversations around the kitchen table.

Heads of department, colleagues and friends, for conversations over coffee.

The very nature of my journey requires the protection of the names of many people who have helped me, while they are not acknowledged publically; their stories and the names of each one of you are held in my heart.

To students past and present who teach me all I know.

Thank you to each and every one.

## Foreword

*What we call the beginning  
Is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.*  
(T.S. Eliot)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This thesis is a story. It tells of how I came to construct and illuminate a reflexive narrative as a journey of self-inquiry and transformation towards personal realisation. It tells of the path to being and becoming a reflective nurse educator. Drawing upon insights gained through the inquiry, I plot my vision of becoming student kind, exploring the impact of different influences on how this core idea is constructed.

This *Foreword* begins with outlining a rationale and setting the context for my interest in constructing a reflexive narrative. It progresses with clarifying the term educator and provides a background to reflection and reflective practice.

Recognising that the inquiry takes place at a particular time and circumstance, I position myself in relation to research approaches with awareness of subjectivity. The essence of the data shapes the insights throughout my inquiry. I construct the thesis now with the wisdom of hindsight.

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<sup>1</sup> Eliot, T.S. (1963) Little Gidding: Stanza V, Four Quartets *Collected Poems 1909-1962* [1942] London: Faber and Faber Ltd p.221

My thesis weaves a story journeying personal and professional development which has informed my day to day work life. In this way, my inquiry is a spiral of practice, engagement with theory, informing practice and therefore, emerges as praxis.

## **Rationale**

My inquiry seeks to illuminate my learning through a lived experience of reflection as a journey of being and becoming a reflective practitioner. The meaning of reflection in this way, describes a purposeful endeavour moving towards 'a more reflective, effective and satisfactory life' (Johns 2013, p.1). The purpose of my inquiry in seeking to advance understanding of the potential and challenges towards becoming a reflective nurse educator grounded in a reflexive narrative approach is fourfold. Firstly, insights gained through a reflexive narrative reveal my vision as nurse educator informing my everyday work. Secondly, personal and professional learning will guide my approaches to student centred learning in relationships with individual students and in the classroom, providing a foundation for students to develop themselves as person centred practitioners with patients and their families. In so doing, generate new knowledge in managing the tensions constraints and contradictions in realising my vision of desirable practice in nurse education. Thirdly, understanding through participation in guided reflection, will inform my facilitation of guided reflection with students. It will advance discourse around the potential challenges in collaborating and embedding guided reflection in preregistration nurse education curricula within the complex world of higher education at regional and national level. Lastly, Mann *et al.* (2009) in systematic review, conclude that a creative range of research designs and methods are necessary to contribute to understanding reflective practice. Using reflexive narrative inquiry (Johns 2010), aims, therefore, to advance the discussion surrounding the value of

such research approaches in developing practitioner knowledge as a fusion of teaching and research.

The rationale for carrying out this inquiry lies in the well documented findings in the literature whereby reflection is advocated as a learning strategy for health care professionals (Boud *et al.* 1985, Mann *et al.* 2009). Bulman (2013, p.1) argues that being reflective is crucial for 'effective and person-centred professional practice'. Yet reflection as a term is in itself challenging, while frequently used is frequently misunderstood and is described as a contested term (Burns and Bulman 2012, Smith 2011). Taking this a step further, Mezirow (2000) argues that reflection only leads to learning if it leads to transformation. In keeping with this view, using Johns (2010) approach to self- inquiry is critical in demonstrating a journey of transformation showing how my thinking and practice has changed. A view supported by Drevdahl *et al.* (2002) proposition that the integration of self-study offers a valuable method towards advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The thesis documents my search for a vision to guide my practice. A vision of student kind describes an enhanced way of being with students, of being mindful. Hence my inquiry aims to provide evidence for the value of reflective practice in developing self and practice as a nurse educator within the complex world of higher education. Insights gained inform my ability to lead and guide the reflective journey both for myself and for students at all levels. These insights also inform my contribution to discussion on learning and curriculum development.

A reflexive narrative approach as devised by Johns (2010) is a pioneering approach that presents challenges, with an overall benefit of an inquiry that is embedded in my practice reality. While my inquiry does not appear to neatly fit in the traditional organisation of research, I nevertheless present a thesis which

gives testament to reflexive narrative research as a strategy for personal and professional development. By inference my inquiry has the potential to advance the dialogue regarding reflective practice as integral to professional development in nurse education.

### **Educator as a term**

I have chosen to use the word educator as an overarching term through my inquiry. This nomenclature is based on the original Latin derivation:<sup>2</sup>

*Educere: meaning to draw or lead out, to bring forth, to refine.*

*Educare: meaning to bring up, to foster, to nourish, to develop.*

*Educatum: meaning the act of teaching or training.*

These terms suggest that education is regarded as the process of drawing out all the inherent abilities of an individual (*Educere*), developing these abilities (*Educare*) providing teaching and training (*Educatum*) and enabling the person to reach potential. For me the term educator encompasses all aspects of curriculum. It is inclusive of beliefs and values, embraces learning approaches and structures which create space to support learning. Whereas the term, 'teach' has more didactic inferences, about imparting knowledge to a person. My primary degree prepared me for a role as a registered nurse tutor employed in a school of nursing a term not recognised at the university. Brown and Atkins (1988) suggest that to teach effectively necessitates a knowledge of subject, an understanding of how students learn and knowledge of how to teach. The university offers a broad focus on *Engaged learning* (2014) strategy aimed to develop a learning environment that engages students. Nevertheless, as Palmer and Scribner (2007) write whatever the term and 'the line of work it is important

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<sup>2</sup>Oxford English dictionary [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014], Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014]

to connect who you are with what you do, to 'rejoin soul and role' (p. 8). This view is in keeping with the nature of my inquiry.

## **Background to reflection**

Reflection crosses the disciplinary boundaries of education and health care. The field of literature is vast. As a foundation for this inquiry, it can be considered into three distinct, but often overlapping, elements: reflection, nurse education and the use of reflection as a way of professional learning.

Theoretical debate abounds in the literature surrounding reflection from Aristotle's argument that the unexamined life is not worth living, to the suggestion that reflective learning could improve professional practice by modern day educational writers such as Brookfield (1995), Freshwater (2000) Johns (2009), Mezirow (1981), Rolfe (2002), Rolfe *et al.* (2011) and Schön (1983). Jarvis (1992) and Burns and Bulman (2000) note that reflective practice while a frequently used term is an infrequently defined concept. O'Connor *et al.* (2003) and Tate (2004) suggest that reflection and reflective practice are terms often use synonymously and interchangeably.

I heed Johns (2010) advice to take a more practical focus to definition rather than undertake an abstract analysis of the concept. Johns (2013) describes reflection as

being mindful of self, either within or after experience, as if a mirror in which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of a particular experience, in order to confront, understand and move towards resolving contradiction between one's vision and actual practice (p. 2).

I take this simpler description of the meaning of reflection whereby reflection is a purposeful activity that moves through description towards transformation. Reflection thus understood involves several dimensions whereby an experience is revisited with openness, seeking to explore the influences in how and why



things happened the way that they did. Critically, the individual seeks to look beyond an experience with knowledge and insight into looking at doing things in a better way. The ultimate aim is to clarify individual beliefs, acting to transform and improve self and practice. In this manner, the past informs the present going beyond the experience and guiding future personal and professional development.

An essential part to this endeavour is dialogue and guidance in challenging, supporting and considering the consequences of action (Johns 2009). Reflective practice extends from doing reflection towards a way of being a reflective practitioner.

### **Understanding reflective practice**

Doing reflection takes an epistemological view as though reflection is a tool or device. Being reflective takes an ontological approach focussed on the sense of being and is *about who I am rather than what I do* (Johns 2013, p. 2). Johns (2013) highlights the value of a sense of being within a practice discipline like nursing where the main therapy is enacted through the use of self. On this basis reflection is an ever evolving process of being and becoming.

There are many frameworks available to support this process and some of the most frequently cited include Gibbs (1998), Johns (2009, 2010, 2013), Rolfe *et al.* (2011). The frameworks devised by Johns have undergone many revisions promoting deeper reflection on experiences, always with the intention of changing self and practice.

Reflective practice as a learning strategy has received attention in the institutions that set the direction for nursing. The Higher Education Academy (2004)

explored the development of critical reflection in the health professions.<sup>3</sup> Literature surrounding education for nurses has identified reflection as a strategy to promote personal and professional development (Government of Ireland<sup>4</sup>, 2000, Bulman *et al.* (2012, 2013). Registration bodies such as the Irish nursing board (An Bord Altranais<sup>5</sup> 2005) promote reflection as a concept and a requisite underpinning education programmes.

Nurse educators' views of facilitating reflective practice include papers by Carroll *et al.* (2002), O'Connor *et al.* (2003) and McCarthy *et al.* (2013) from an Irish perspective and from the UK: Burnard (1995) and Bulman and Schutz (2013). According to O'Connor and Hyde (2005) teaching students to reflect on their practice is considered a fundamental part of nurse education. There are limited reports of students' knowledge and use of reflective practice. For example Durgahee (1996) found that reflection helped post graduate students focus and question practice. Collington and Hunt (2006) using an ethnomethodology approach over three years explored student midwives and midwives' perceptions of how critical reflection is facilitated. They concluded that while journal writing had a positive influence in promoting reflection, there is need for further strategies to facilitate reflective learning among qualified staff. Bailey and Graham (2007) evaluated experiences of seven registered nurses of a guided reflective practice group in a hospice setting. They identified personal and professional development benefits due to participating in such a group.

There are some recent nurse led publications based upon reflection in clinical practice (Fordham 2010, 2014, Foster 2010) and the extensive work of Johns (2009, 2010, 2013). There is, however scant literature published by educators describing their personal reflective processes in depth. Casey (2010) used participatory action research in the realms of physical education, though the

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<sup>3</sup> Physiotherapy, pharmacy, paramedics, occupational therapy, nursing, midwifery, mental health nursing, dietetics, complementary therapy and teaching.

<sup>4</sup> Commission on Nursing, recommendation; integration of nurse education into third level.

<sup>5</sup> Irish Nursing Board, since 2013 Nursing and Midwifery Board Ireland

focus had less emphasis on structured or guided reflection. Pelias (2004) explored the perspective of an academic working within a performance discipline. This text detailed an autoethnographic approach but failed to pay attention to the coherence of the construction of the narrative plot or provide detailed engagement with the transformative elements critical to my study. Frost and Taylor (1996) reflect on academic role development and challenges through attainment of tenure from an American perspective. Their themes include balancing research, publication, teaching and administration described by several contributors rather than a study by one individual. This contribution while relevant, does not give sufficient attention to the role of supporting learning and engaging with students central to my inquiry.

Acceptance of the benefit of supporting students to reflect poses the question - do the people facilitating such activities engage in reflection themselves? Only if, I 'walk the walk' in footsteps with students, will I gain an appreciation of the potential, challenges and commitment demanded of reflective writing. My role involves leading a Protected Reflective Time strand in the curriculum (Appendix 1). Living with the challenge, amidst confusion, acknowledging the complexity of real life, provides an opportunity for meaningful learning. Taking such a view helps inform and sustain intentions towards realising desirable practice. And in so doing, I believe that I can then, truly support and guide others in a reflective community of inquiry. Reflective dialogue is always exposing, always becoming, and never ends. The thesis sets out to show reflection as lived rather than an abstract theoretical debate.

### **My background as context to the inquiry**

It is important to provide a background, biases, history, philosophy and circumstances that influence the conduct of study, especially where prior knowledge impacts on the outcomes (O'Connor 2011, Silverman 2004). Originally, I was attracted to considering a critical use of Johns (2009, 2010)

approaches because of the continued focus on paying attention to the beliefs and values guiding and informing my every day work as a lived reality. The move from espoused theory to praxis seems a simple yet complex research undertaking which is grounded in everyday reality. In this way, aiming to show as Taylor (2006) suggests that human encounters, in my case with students, are ordinary in an extraordinary world. Reflective thinking processes echo and resonate through my search for what Fay (1987) calls enlightenment, empowerment, emancipation and transformation as a nurse educator. Through the process of engaging in this inquiry I learn to hold the tension between the ideal and the reality of my day to day practice. Such self-study contributes to the enhancement of my facilitation and promotion of student centred learning capable of flourishing in the midst of adversity. My reflections reveal the potential realisation of my vision and influences that constrain my practice.

My journey illustrates and reveals a journey of being, towards becoming. This is illuminated by Johns (2002) noting

being is the reflection of the practitioner's clinical practice as known through reflection stories written and shared. Becoming is the reflection on the practitioner's own journey from where she is now to where she wants to be, as known by looking back through the unfolding series of reflected-on experiences to perceive self as transformed or not (Johns 2002, p. x).

My inquiry is grounded in the context of my lived reality and is not intended to be generalisable but rather contributes to dialogue about the insights, benefits and challenges of one practitioner's experience of using a reflexive narrative methodology.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The construction of a reflexive narrative offers a novel approach to the creation of a thesis and hence requires a different structure to best represent the work. The following structure, therefore, is used to navigate the inquiry.

The thesis begins with a first chapter *Setting out*, exploring the historical, social, educational and professional influences shaping my life, a fundamental starting point for the journey. An appreciation of where I have come from as a person, as a nurse, as an educator and as a student is embedded within a self-study inquiry that recognises at the start the subjective nature of the work.

Chapter 2, *Constructing a reflexive narrative* illuminates the methodological framework that gives structure to the narrative. It examines the influences and approaches I have taken in constructing a reflexive narrative through the use of a bricolage drawing upon literary texts, autoethnography, critical social theory, hermeneutic perspectives and dialogue. This uniquely constructed narrative fulfils the aims of the inquiry in demonstrating my journey of self-development towards my transformation as a nurse educator.

The narrative is illuminated by Johns (2010) six dialogical movements. Dialogue with self, between self and individual experiences is explored through guidance and the use of reflective tools towards gaining insight, developing a reflective text. Dialogue with literature and guides informs and helps reveal these insights. Each experience is then co-created building upon previous experiences producing a reflexive narrative in the spirit of an ever evolving hermeneutic spiral.

The six interrelated dialogical movements frame the patterns that unfold my reflexive journey of self realisation in being and becoming a reflective educator. Self-inquiry is a process where I am the research and the researcher, acknowledging that throughout the thesis, claims are partial and insights incomplete and therefore attention is given to the authenticity of the inquiry. The dilemmas in relation to recall of experiences and choices made around including and excluding texts are explored. Attention is paid to the claims that I

make regarding integrity and coherence of the inquiry. The ethical considerations that pervade the inquiry are discussed. Detailed attention to all these interrelated elements is critical in demonstrating an understanding of how the data that eventually became the coherent narrative is presented in Chapter 3, *Narrative*.

The third chapter presents a series of nineteen experiences that through reflection and engagement in dialogue lead to a reflexive narrative that shows gradual and emerging insights supporting my claims for transformation towards being and becoming a reflective educator. Further reflections are presented in Appendices. My reflections show a movement from being maternal trying to fix things and feelings of anxiety, towards a listening presence with compassion, with empathy and poise in dialogue. These texts are presented chronologically but are not linear. They shape and change in an implicit way as each text informs the other as the journey progresses. These evolving insights are then considered in a more structured way in the next chapter.

Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind* explores my insights framed through the Being Available Template devised by Johns (2013) guided by Bohm's (1996) approach to dialogue. Insights are illuminated through a more comprehensive engagement with literature, broadening the consideration of the relationship between many sources of knowing and my claims in relation to self and ways of knowing. Being available, becoming student kind, becomes the core of my narrative. Underpinning my narrative is an emerging sense of mindfulness expressed as spirituality foregrounding my ability to be available. I consider the interrelated idea of a dialogical voice drawing upon the work of Bohm (1996) and Belenky *et al.* (1986) which becomes increasingly important in my practice with individual students, in the classroom and with colleagues. This path to becoming student kind creates a learning space for students promoting growth and

development so that students in turn are able to enter into a nurse patient relationship through being available.

The *Afterword* (Chapter 5), reflects on a long journey of constructing a reflexive narrative. I return to significant layers within the narrative namely guidance, ethical relationships and writing. I consider becoming a reflective educator as expressed in being available, becoming student kind offering five stepping stones for dialogue.

The thesis ends with a final chapter *Stepping towards an uncertain future* exploring the contribution that reflexive narrative inquiry makes to my practice and considers the strengths and challenges therein. I share concluding thoughts on my reflection of undertaking a reflexive narrative. This aims to contribute to the development and potential of such inquiry as a way for individuals to develop insights. In this way my story fuses educational practice and research, through reflection echoing a dialogical voice revealing practice wisdom. To paraphrase Eliot my reflection begins with an end and ends with a beginning.

## Chapter 1 Setting out

*This is the setting out*  
*The leaving of everything behind*  
*Leaving the social milieu.*  
*The preconceptions.*  
*The definitions.*  
*The language.*  
*The narrowed field of vision.*  
*The expectations.*  
*No longer expecting relationships, memories, words or letters to mean what they*  
*used to mean.*  
*To be, in a word: Open*  
(Rabbi Lawrence Kushner) <sup>6</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter aims to enable me to position 'who I am' within the context of my narrative of being and becoming a nurse educator. This approach is offered at the beginning, acknowledging that the inquiry embraces subjectivity to the forefront. This chapter will only offer a partial reconstruction and is given without interpretation. This approach is guided by Heidegger's (1964) concept of fore-structure:

*Fore-having* is described as something we have in advance from our past that has shaped 'who we are' - our family our professional association, life events;

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<sup>6</sup>cited by Wheatley, M.(2006) Leadership and the New Science, Discovering Order in a Chaotic World 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Berett-Koehler publications Inc. p. 224



*Fore-sight* is something we have now as we begin the journey which influences us now – issues of role, context values;

*Fore-conception* is something we see in advance that gives us direction to the narrative ideas of what self-realisation might mean -vision and agenda.

Heidegger's description of these elements is tightly knitted together in this chapter. The chapter structure addresses three aspects;

where I am coming from in terms of how I come to be the person I am starting this inquiry, and the values and experiences that influence the inquiry?

where I am now in terms of my role, and values that inform my practice?

where I am heading to?

This chapter offers the reader a view of the background from which this work materialises, bringing to the fore my personal, education and practice influences to this inquiry. I acknowledge at the outset that even the recall and selection of my history is grounded in the context of my subjective knowing.

I begin by describing a starting point to give consideration to the context of where I have come from, where I am as a person: a daughter, a mother, sister, wife, colleague, friend, student, and as an employee and educator. Acknowledging these everyday influences and biases is critical in helping to make sense of my understanding of my values in shaping and guiding my vision of practice. Setting the scene gives the reader an appreciation of my emerging insights which will ebb and flow through the reflexive journey. I begin by exploring my beginnings.

## **Beginnings**

I have always wanted to be a nurse and come from a family that is dedicated to caring for each other and community. My upbringing was in an Irish Catholic faith based traditional community. Nuala and Jim, my parents fostered a broad Christian approach to family life. Love and kindness encompassed our world. Charity towards the less fortunate within a spirit of altruism and social justice was encouraged. Loyalty to family, community and organisation was an important value. My upbringing while encouraging a respect for authority also urged us to speak up for the weak and vulnerable in society. My education took place in an 'all girls' catholic schools under the direction of the Holy Faith Sisters where the school aimed to 'provide an excellent all-round education in a Christian environment.'<sup>7</sup> Many of my classmates became teachers, nurses, health care professionals and social workers.

As a child, nature was an important part of family life. Beach walks along the east coast and later in the west coast of Kerry were undertaken in all weathers, in all seasons, while we chatted and put the world to rights. We gathered shells, stones, watched birds, studied plants and learned about tides and weather systems from Jim (father). We now follow these same traditions with our own family. Nature continues to be a source of calm and renewal to my life. I have now come to realise that nature is part of who I am.

At home we sat around a table always chatting inventing a term 'kitchenitis' as we talked of social justice, books and poetry. Nuala inspired in us a love of literature. It was not unusual to come home from school and see and hear Mom quoting Macbeth or the romantic poetry of Wordsworth while preparing dinner. As life continues so these conversations continue.

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<sup>7</sup> School website [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012]

At home and at school I was exposed to writers like Freire, Sartre and de Beauvoir. I now see that there were many contradictions between these liberal ideas and the corresponding beliefs surrounding conforming to authority and loyalty to organisations. My memories are of a loving cherished environment. There was an affectionate expression of emotions towards each other and listening unconditionally to another. Anger and conflict were avoided rather than taking an assertive approach. A framed copy of the poem *Footprints in the sand*<sup>8</sup> hangs in my parents' kitchen. This poem encompasses many of my family values interwoven with nature, the sea and Christianity.

### ***Footprints in the Sand***

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord,  
You promised me Lord,

that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?

The Lord replied, "The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you."

Such ideas from my childhood offer a glimpse of my past world. This historical view informs my current reality. Inevitably, my background shaped my choices in applying to schools of nursing which had a Christian ethos.

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<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, M.(1936) [www.footprints-in-the-sand.com /index.php?page=Poem](http://www.footprints-in-the-sand.com/index.php?page=Poem) [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011]

## Beginning as a nurse

My nursing education began at the School of Nursing, IMTH,<sup>9</sup> Drogheda, led by a religious order, Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM) a congregation formed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Ireland, many religious congregations managed both hospitals and schools. There was an emphasis on nursing as a vocation. An apprenticeship model of training prevailed where students formed part of the workforce. The school and student residences were based at the hospital site.

My education saw the art of nursing sandwiched in a curriculum, based on a syllabus that concentrated on medical and surgical nursing. It was governed by the standards and syllabi as laid down by An Bord Altranais, the Irish Nursing Board. There was an expectation that students acquire a detailed knowledge of pathophysiology and many other 'ologies'. Scant attention to holistic nursing was evident in syllabi.

Nevertheless, at Drogheda some things seemed different. Barbara McNamara MMM (John Bosco<sup>10</sup>), Principal, pushed the boundaries of our education within the limitations of her role. Barbara talked about professional identity, and patient centred ideas. Barbara spoke to us passionately about caring for the whole person.

McCarthy and O'Connor (2004, p. 23) in commemorating *Nursing Education in Drogheda* concur with this view, noting that 'a new nursing perspective emerged' as nurse tutors brought many progressive ideas from nursing scholars in the UK. We were introduced to the Roper Logan Tierney model of nursing. Barbara moved beyond the traditional domain of the ethical principles taught by Catholic clergy, towards an exploration of our beliefs informing decision making. I believe that this was a unique approach to the teaching of ethics within

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<sup>9</sup>International Missionary Training Hospital

<sup>10</sup> Many women religious took on a given saint's name when joining a religious order

certificate nursing in Ireland. In particular, we were introduced to Frankl, author of *Mans Search for Meaning*.<sup>11</sup> This book was gifted to me by a life-long friend from our class and this gift in itself shows the influence of the approach. Barbara started each day in the School of Nursing with a spiritual thought for the day. We worked our way through many quotes from de Chardin, a French Jesuit, and philosopher.<sup>12</sup> One quote by de Chardin (1995, p. 31) stays with me:

Seeing, we might say that the whole of life lies in that verb if not ultimately at least essential.

This quote now resurfaces. My memories of being a student at the IMTH bring to mind a spirit of fostering the development of each student as a person who was seen as an individual and as part of a community and a member of a profession. I recall an emphasis on each 'girl' becoming aware of the importance of individual moral and social responsibility. Perhaps it is a sentimental view, but my time at the IMTH was one of an education based on a belief in the positive affirmation of each of us. McCarthy and O'Conner (2004, p. 23) identified that Barbara placed an emphasis on the personal development of students as a means of helping them to learn to care for others. The development of self-awareness was seen as an essential skill.

There was an underlying expectation that we were committed to working and studying hard, acquiring knowledge and skills to perform as nurses. We lived in student residences. Many evenings we discussed the daily life of a student nurse. We gossiped about staff and work but not in a mischievous way.

My memory recalls swapping stories of tiredness, of heavy workloads, fears associated with learning on the job. We talked about the sadness, the tragedies of the workplace. We talked about our first experience of the death of a patient,

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<sup>11</sup> Creator of logotherapy survived the concentration camps of world war 2

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin explored the relationship between humankind, where the coalescence of consciousness leads to a new state of peace and planetary unity.

witnessing cardiac arrests, road traffic victims, sudden infant death. Many of these issues still dominate the nursing stories of students today. We had discussions in class about these topics. Always, however, after the pathophysiology of conditions and positioned towards the end of sessions. I heard little about self-care or about stress and bereavement, as we muddled through and supported each other.

### **Coronary care nursing**

My interest in pathophysiology and a desire to be competent in taking charge of the management of cardiac arrest stemmed from my first experience of witnessing CPR. I was on my first 'male medical' placement when this happened. I felt powerless and disturbed that I had not done enough for the patient. I chose to undertake a Coronary Care Nursing programme. I liked the idea of a challenge in taking care of a person who was more alert and not sedated in the same way as patients in ICU. I worked with a team at the Mater Hospital, Dublin which was also under the direction of a religious congregation, the Mercy sisters. At the Mater I was introduced to cutting edge technology. My initial emphasis was on the grasping of detailed cardiac pathophysiology and pharmacology. The technical rational nature of my work had priority. This was to be expected. In a coronary setting, competence to act in an emergency is critical given the acute and often dramatic nature of the nursing care required. I struggled and searched for something beyond the focus of the bio electrical management of arrhythmia to one of concern for the person. I floundered in making sense of this dichotomy.

I found one of my case study records while clearing the attic, illustrating this point.

Mr Michael W,<sup>13</sup> an 82 year old was admitted with central chest pain radiating down his left arm. Details of blood abnormalities are given. His

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonym

ECG confirmed a diagnosis of an anterior myocardial infarction (M.I.). Heart rhythm records show 'st elevations' with runs of ventricular tachycardia. Anti-arrhythmic agents, titration and response are given.

My reports show the development of heart failure, the management and response to diuretics and many other drugs throughout his stay in CCU. I recall discussion round his age and whether there should be aggressive management. Towards the end of the case study the holistic aspect of Michael's care received some scant attention under a heading psycho social care. I learned much about this man during my chats with him during night duty:

Michael was a widower of six months and his next of kin was his son. There were plans for rehabilitation but little appreciation of where Michael was coming from as an individual and his level of independence and mobility before his M.I. He cycled the short journey to the hospital, despite the pain, describing the journey 'as if he was cycling up a huge hill.

Michael described being lonely since the death of his wife. He did not want to be a burden to his son. He was afraid of dying.

These comments were written at the end of the case study. Yet, much of this man's story came from our conversations which were never documented.

I worked at the Mater for three years, became very involved in teaching students on the CCU course, and enjoyed this dimension to my role. I became aware that the world of CCU was a stressful working environment. I wanted more opportunities to consider the integration of holistic care in my development as a nurse.

### **Moving to Limerick**

I moved to Limerick. My background and expertise in Coronary Care helped me secure a post at St Johns' Hospital. This hospital was under the guidance of

another religious order. This was a period of limited job opportunities in Ireland. I worked as a staff nurse taking care of an increasingly older client group and undertook a Diploma in Gerontology. Afterwards, attitudes towards older people became part of my dissertation at undergraduate level. I have continued to work with teams caring for older people and this continues as an important focus for my teaching.

At St. Johns I found myself increasingly drawn towards supporting student nurses in practice. I secured an acting position as a tutor. Here too was an emphasis on detailed understanding of anatomy and physiology underpinning nursing care. However, this was to change, as I came under the guidance of another woman religious, Catherine O'Connell of the Little Company of Mary, a deeply spiritual mentor. During this time, I was exposed to many discussions around promoting a more holistic dimension to practice. Catherine had an in depth understanding of physiology but also a huge commitment to the art of nursing. We worked together in a synergistic relationship that nurtured my development. I was encouraged to attend conferences, to read nursing journals, and to be in touch with the rapidly changing world of nurse education.

Later, I realised that this preparatory work was a foundation for my move toward a formal role in education. Catherine was concerned about the development of students as people in the style of Barbara at Drogheda. It was as though my world had come full circle. Catherine encouraged and advocated on my behalf to enable me to pursue my education, to follow through my ideas around student learning. Catherine died in 2012 and at the funeral services people spoke of

'her independence as a woman'

'a leader before her time'

'wise'

'humble, committed, challenging us to think to question'.



CJ<sup>14</sup> has pressed me to think more about the influence of both Barbara and Catherine as heroines in my development. Initially, Barbara provided the bedrock to my nursing that led me on the path to work with Catherine. There are many stories that could be included to illustrate Catherine as a role model but these are beyond the confines of this chapter.

Catherine was principal tutor, but our relationship was collegial. Barbara's influence was different as I was a student nurse and knew nothing else of nurse training. By the time I grew to know Catherine I had worked in several nursing organisations. I sensed that my time at St. Johns was unique, in terms of personal and professional learning.

Any appreciation of the role of Catherine and Barbara in my development is open to subjectivity - a view, through rose tinted glasses. The positive influence that such women have had on individual formation can be contested.

Changes at St. Johns led to an offer to support me in studying for a Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme at University College Dublin (UCD). This was the first degree programme for nurses in an Irish university, enabling me to become a registered nurse tutor. Catherine believed that it was possible for me to do the course and encouraged me to seize the opportunity. At this time, with two small children, the next phase of my development depended on the continued support of by husband, Dan and my family in realising my dream.

### **Beginning as a nurse tutor**

My approaches to nursing and teaching were further developed by studying the humanist theories of Rogers and Knowles, at UCD and guided by our core text *The Principles and Practices of Nurse Education* by Quinn (1995). I thought that I brought genuineness and empathy to my work. I believed that I was thoughtful

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout the thesis Prof C Johns as supervisor and guide is referred to as CJ

and considerate towards students. I listened to their worries with an underlying unease and offered advice. I thought that I understood the world of students. But the process was very much teacher led and we were regarded as the sources of knowledge and seen as the experts. As I look back now, I see that this approach was one of benevolence under an umbrella of patriarchy. There was a concern for students and attempts to fix problems and find solutions. The emphasis was on minding and caring for students.

At UCD, study involved many discussions around caring. We were introduced to Carpers (1978) patterns of knowing. Judith Chavasse<sup>15</sup> introduced our class to the ideas behind keeping reflective diaries as a process for reviewing our clinical teaching experiences. These reflective diaries formed part of an assessment and I used an early version of Johns' MSR framework to guide that assignment.

So began my first experiences of reflective writing. I recall supporting a student caring for a young woman with a brain injury. Our task was to help with the activities of living and involved a routine change of catheter. The focus shifted from teaching the physical skills towards an exploration of how the student was coping in taking care of this young woman. My interest was ignited, but as yet I was unsure of how to structure and use such processes.

### **Beginning to use reflection**

Back in Limerick, I secured a post as a nurse tutor at the Regional School of Nursing. This was my first time working in a non-religious run organisation. Major changes in Irish nurse education began with the development of a Diploma in Nursing in association with the university. A course was run in preparation for clinical placement coordinators (CPC's) to support students in practice, which included a reflective practice component. Participants engaged in guided group reflection. I volunteered to participate in the facilitation of these

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<sup>15</sup> Head of Department

sessions with David Clarke, Director of the Centre for Nursing Studies at the University, who came from the UK and brought with him an understanding of reflection. My interest was fuelled. Together we wrote an evaluation of the process (Clarke and Graham 1996).

The insights gained from such a process shaped our curriculum development for the Diploma in Nursing. I organised structures to facilitate students to engage in guided group reflection throughout the three year programme. David and Catherine were in the background helping me make sense of the theory in facilitating these sessions.

### **Walking the walk**

During the time while I was a member of a team guiding these diploma students I became aware of the old maxim 'walking the walk'. Did I ask students to do something that I was not doing? It became important for me to keep a reflective diary. The diary I kept was very superficial and descriptive. Some colleagues were very sceptical about the benefits of reflection and raised many concerns. For me there were also many unanswered questions;

How to facilitate reflection?

Why use frameworks?

What frameworks to use?

Was the assessment of diaries ethical?

Was it confessional?

I needed to debate these issues in an informed manner. Catherine encouraged me to undertake further study, an essential criteria for a post in nurse education as part of the integration of nursing into third level education. I began an MSc in Nursing at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), again spending considerable time away from home. I explored some of my questions with the submission of a reflective portfolio. The first reflection I use in this inquiry (in Chapter 3) is based and

developed from an original diary entry which I began as part of that portfolio. I chose this reflection on the basis that it might be important to show my starting point and how this experience has led to further work.

For my MSc research I thought enquiry into reflection seemed a worthwhile possibility. This led to my dissertation which explored students' experiences of keeping reflective diaries (Graham 1999). I continued to keep my own reflective diary in a sporadic manner and occasionally read journal articles related to reflective practice. I failed to address or delve into the transformation element which for me now is one of the critical dimensions in reflection.

### **Role as a nurse educator**

Back at the Limerick Regional School of Nursing, we sought to expand an existing diploma style apprenticeship programme. The curriculum gave flexibility to include attention to the art of nursing as well as the pathophysiology of disease. I was given space and opportunity to work with small groups of students. Class schedules were organised by the school with students mostly based at the hospital, School of Nursing. I had flexibility to engage in creative strategies with opportunities to explore ideas around caring in art workshops, organised debates and guest speakers.

But parallel to this freedom was a traditional education structure whereby students were passive learners. There were detailed records and expectations of attendance at every class. I was introduced as Ms Graham and some colleagues referred to students as 'nurse'. There was a dress code for staff and students. It was expected that very detailed hand-outs were given as exam preparation. There was much testing of knowledge acquisition. The teaching of research, caring and ethics were seen as novel subjects rather than core activities.

Against this background there were aspects of my role that caused me confusion. Student nurses were not actively encouraged or supported to take responsibility for their own learning. The Irish government outlined a strategic plan for the graduate profession expecting students to be

professional nurses who are safe, caring, competent decision makers willing to accept personal and professional accountability for evidence based practice (Government of Ireland [The Nurse Education Forum]s 2000, p. 9).

The Irish Nursing Board, An Bord Altranais (2005) states in the standards for registration expects that programme outcomes see students 'as critical thinkers and reflective practitioners'. My thought processes around these aspirations were mixed. I agreed with the intentions but was unsure about how they could be achieved. I did not see myself as a critical thinker and was a very novice researcher.

My initial questions around these issues stayed beneath the surface as the Government initiated major change and transfer of nurse education to third level education. This strategy introduced a four year, pre-registration, BSc Nursing programme fully integrated into higher education. Nurse tutors became part of the university staff.

### **Moving to higher education**

Joining the university led to increased expectations and demands for scholarly activity and research. Sometimes chance meetings with students in corridors or coffee shops on campus let me know that many of them had struggles. Around this period Sarah and Andrew, our children, were third level students. They reinforced for me the challenges in being a student. They and their friends occasionally shared some tales of woe regarding assignments and exam stress reminding me of the individuality of student life. I felt that I was placing less emphasis and value on my core role as an educator.

My role as a university course director placed me in a unique position to learn how the system and many of the structures of the university worked. We now had bigger classes, central timetabling, administrative structures and a very different work ethic, more responsibility and more freedom. My role involved considerable liaising and coordination with colleagues in the Health Service Executive across many diverse sites. It included many administrative responsibilities concerning students in difficulties.

My recollection of the first years was more of a focus on **me**, fitting in, and developing an understanding of the milieu of a third level institution. There seemed to be an emphasis on schedules and lecture delivery mode rather than supporting students. It was easy to fall into the lecturer mode and deliver well prepared lectures. I began to see students in a more distant way and always in relation to their academic performance. The lists of students and their overall academic performance were organised and structured in a numerical way. I knew this was important to avoid confusion and chaos. The presentation of students at examination boards bears testimony to this structure. Lengthy lists which were rechecked and presented as student number, name and level of award. A necessary task, nevertheless, a narrow view of a journey of individual tribulations and joys.

While continuing working with students I became aware of the possibilities and benefits of reflection to support qualified nurses. As part of my work with a local hospice, an opportunity arose to facilitate guided group reflection with qualified nurses. I facilitated these sessions with Maria Bailey, the education officer at the Hospice. For a full year we came together in a guided reflection group. At each session diary entries were shared. An art workshop formed part of the project evaluation. We shared our learnings at the workshop. My doodle from the workshop is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

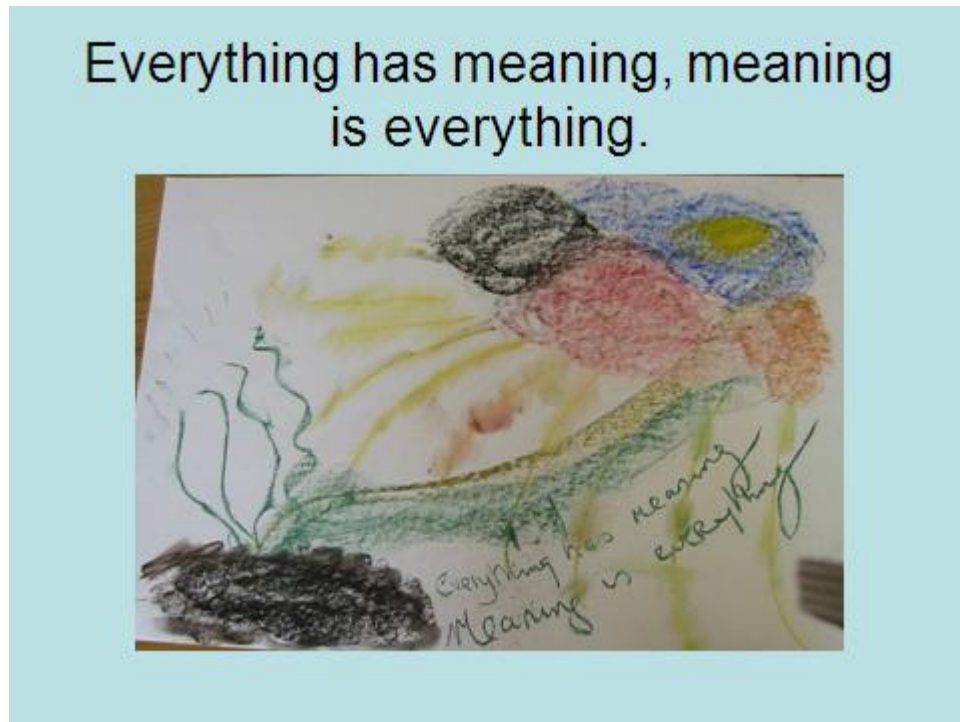


Figure 1.1 A Kaleidoscope of Reflection

I wrote my comment, 'everything has meaning, meaning is everything' in the context of my experiences of guiding this group. I later recalled that this quote was from the text by Frankl, which Barbara had first introduced to me as a student in Drogheda.

The evaluation of the guided reflection project formed the basis of a presentation at a hospice conference and later a paper at the Reflective Practice Conference in Cambridge, 2006 (Bailey and Graham 2007). In Cambridge I had the privilege to meet and hear the work of Lou Jarrett and Maria Fordham students with Prof Johns. Listening to the words of Jarrett and Fordham was inspiring. I became keen to undertake further study but I was apprehensive about my abilities to undertake such study. The opportunity to be part of a community of reflection was exciting but also challenging. Any further study would involve logistics of time, travel and distance while holding a full time position.

## **Making the choice**

I started writing and expressing my fears about my ability in an email to CJ suggesting that I thought that my reflections were ordinary, that there was little insight, artistry and critical thinking in them, when compared to those of Lou and Maria. My journal notes words like

Nervous

This is what I ask of students so why not?

What about structures and the time?

How will I get there?

I was concerned about my ability to write, about creating a text that would be subjected to rigorous scrutiny. I worried would such work pass muster. I was nervous about my lack of critical thinking abilities.

I felt that my work was so ordinary. I was sceptical of how such reflection could form the basis for an academic piece of work. On the other hand, I was attracted to this form of learning. I was aware that if I continued to engage in facilitating reflection with responsibility to lead a protected reflective module with final year students, I needed to understand the process. I believed that I had to move from a passive position of reading about the theory of reflective practice to active engagement in reflective thinking. I began study towards a PhD.

This journey began with early morning flights sometimes before dawn, from Shannon to Stansted and onward travel to the University of Bedfordshire. In managing family and work life I chose to manage the commute as simply as possible. Travel has been usually in the form of day trips over the time of the research journey. My studies at UCD and TCD had involved significant travel and time away from home. It seemed that travel to Bedford might be equally difficult. Dan and I discussed the impact on our life and the possible difficulties of time, travel and commitment. But the potential benefits of studying at Bedford with Johns gathered momentum. I spent several months thinking about



the benefits of undertaking study in this way, it seemed such a big risk, a big step. My decision to study at Bedford was supported by the University of Limerick.

### **Community of reflective inquiry**

I joined the reflective community group<sup>16</sup> at Bedford and so began the process with our reflective community. It has been fulfilling being part of the company of my fellow journeymen and women. There have been changes in our band of folk over time as people come and go, a natural progression. The support of our group has been critical in helping me towards insight – Lou,<sup>17</sup> Maria,<sup>18</sup> Lei<sup>19</sup> and later Adenike and Justin. We talk, post, and share stories of successes and difficulties in our Narrative Google site. Dialogue with our group has made my emerging insights possible and helped me take the responsibility to bring about change in my practice.

However there have been challenges. As I go from one space to the next I go from one world to another. My days began with stress about flight check-in times, boarding cards, location of my purse, phone etc. At dawn I use my time to read and reflect and think at Shannon Airport totally oblivious to the surrounding passenger hustle and bustle. I learned a lot about the roads en route to Bedford. At Bedford I sit and drink coffee and study in Costa. I join my fellow students. My concerns shift from worry about the quality of my reflections to concern about how and about what to write. At five I leave the university and return to Stansted to fly home. I am always comforted in the knowledge that this time for me is precious time. The move through time and place became fundamental to my enrichment, exciting and challenging.

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<sup>16</sup> Several names have been used for our group, including narrative group, school of reflective inquiry. For consistency throughout I use the term reflective community.

<sup>17</sup> Lou Jarrett, PhD, 2009

<sup>18</sup> Maria Fordham, PhD 2012

<sup>19</sup> Lei Foster, PhD 2013

### **Beginning beliefs about education**

My professional journey has informed my understanding of nursing and nurse education. My beliefs have fundamentally been influenced by the passion and wisdom of Barbara at Drogheda, and Catherine at St. Johns. These beliefs centred on the idea that if the student is first seen as a person and a learner, then the individual's potential as a nurse will be realised. Being an educator was my core role and supporting students was my 'raison d'être'. This was what originally brought me to begin my long road towards nurse education.

I felt a growing tension between my values and my practice in conforming to what I understood to be the university expectations. I was unclear about how to address this unease and recall an increasing sense of frustration. The moment was right to begin further studies aiming to contribute to my personal and professional development. The choice to be part of a supportive community, to undertake research that was relevant for me, bringing forward my new learning and to gain insights to my daily work seemed like a new path connecting me as a person and my work.

### **Beginning to clear the way**

Looking back on this chapter, it seems now that all roads pointed the way towards my curiosity about reflection. At the time and start of the odyssey, this map was not apparent to me. I sometimes took each step with blind fear and trepidation. Many of the questions that I have raised ten years ago remain unanswered. Perhaps they were and are the wrong questions and perhaps there is always a need to ask more questions.

There are many other people and dimensions to my development not included here, there were many happenstance occurrences. There were occasions of being in the right place and seizing the opportunity. There were moments too, when the thought of travelling drained me. I am glad, however that I have

chosen this road and in the words of a familiar poem from my school days by Robert Frost from *The Road Less Travelled*,<sup>20</sup>

Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I  
took the one less travelled by/ And that has made all the difference.

My practice is grounded in my own value of seeing the uniqueness and individuality of each student. Through this inquiry I aim to show that reviewing these core values informs and sustains my day to day work. My narrative began with an interest in caring for students and the nature of my work. This raises questions about the tension between the ideal and the lived reality in supporting student centred learning. My focus has shifted towards my personal development and like the ebb and flow of the tides foreshadowing my direction. The next chapter shows the methodological approaches taken to construct a narrative I am guided by the quotation from Chung Tzu cited by Wheately (2006, p. 75 )

she who wants to be right without wrong  
order without disorder  
does not understand the principles  
of heaven and earth  
she does not know how  
things hang together  
my continuing passion is to part a curtain  
that invisible shadow that falls between people  
the veil of indifference to each other's presence  
each other's wonder  
each other's human plight.

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<sup>20</sup> Frost, R. (1920) *The road less travelled* in *Mountain Interval* New York: Henry Holt and Company,

## Chapter 2 Constructing a reflexive narrative

*Every tale has a teller, a tale and a reader of the tale, whereby there is an open ended invitation and interconnection between all the elements. Telling stories is elementary to human beings and every story shares a purpose, in this way, stories tell us something about who we are*  
(Richard Kearney)<sup>21</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter sets the academic context for the inquiry. It describes the aims approaches, influences, and frameworks used in constructing a reflexive narrative.

The reflexive narrative methodology I have used follows the innovative pioneering work of Professor Christopher. Johns' approach is a constantly evolving endeavour, drawing upon diverse approaches (Johns 2002, 2010, 2013). At the outset, I acknowledge that my inquiry while unique to me and my role builds on doctoral research of Jarrett (2009) Fordham (2012) and Foster (2013). These theses are from diverse nursing disciplines, using similar self-inquiry approaches. The authors are members of our reflective community of inquiry, and were also supervised by Johns. I follow in their footsteps learning from their insights, influencing my inquiry both in an explicit way where citing them and implicitly through dialogue as we work towards achieving a better world for ourselves and for those whom we serve.

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<sup>21</sup> Kearney,R. (2002) *On Stories Thinking in Action* London: Routledge, p.156

Undertaking a practice based self-narrative and developing my insights is based on the premise that I first have to gain understanding of myself. This enables me to support individual students, promoting learning- helping students become person centred nurses and become the best practitioners they can be. Complementary to this process is the development of my reflective abilities to support reflection with others.

Practice based self-research may not be served by more traditional research designs. I start, with St. Pierre's (1997, p. 157) challenge 'to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently'. St. Pierre (2011) suggests an engagement with what Lather (2007) terms 'post methodology', referred to as

a methodology-to-come in which we begin to do it radically differently wherever we are in our projects (St. Pierre 2011, p. 232).

Such ideas inform my narrative construction. Presenting a personal narrative is challenging, I offer evidence of learning, but the very essence, the subjective nature of the work, showing this as 'new knowledge' is challenging in an academia traditionally governed by science. It is a personal first person narrative and subjectivity is assumed and appreciated throughout the thesis. St. Pierre, cites Rorty:

we only know the world and ourselves *under a description*. For doing so would mean taking seriously the possibility that we just happened on that description - that it was not the description which nature evolved us to apply, or that which best unified the manifold of previous descriptions but just the one which we have now latched onto (St. Pierre 2011, p. 623)

Acknowledging the complexity of constructing a narrative as lived, I strive to aid clarity by structuring the chapter around the following

Aims and objectives of the inquiry

Setting the context of the inquiry in the academic literature

Using the 6 dialogical movements approach

Ethical considerations

This structure accommodates the multidimensional nature of constructing narrative representation: moving from individual experience to stories to reflective text; weaving a reflexive narrative through guidance; co-creating with guides and peers; plotting a journey of being and becoming a nurse educator.

### **Aims and objectives of the inquiry**

This inquiry aims to demonstrate my reflexive narrative as a journey of self-inquiry and transformation towards self-realisation in being and becoming a nurse educator.

The objectives are to:

- consider my personal vision as a nurse educator
- interpret the insights throughout the narrative
- document and examine transformation as a nurse educator in realising desirable practice as a lived reality
- construct a coherent and reflexive narrative of my journey
- demonstrate the value of guided reflection in developing new personal and professional knowledge
- advance dialogue surrounding the potential of reflexive narrative as a research approach.

### **Setting the context of the inquiry in the academic literature**

Initially I explore narrative and narrative plot. I present a bricolage as a practical way of illustrating the diverse philosophical influences that frame and complement the construction of my reflexive narrative. Then I turn to give a greater in depth focus to the 6 dialogical movements' framework of Johns (2010, 2013).

### **Narrative**

Narrative and experience go hand in hand within qualitative inquiry and are about the telling, listening and reading of stories, stimulating senses and imagination to encourage us to see our reality more clearly. Narrative inquiry stems from the assumption that human beings make sense of experience through the imposition of story structures.

The terms storytelling and narrative are core to reflection and used interchangeably (Freshwater 2011). For me I begin with an experience, writing a story, which is reflected upon, becoming part of the narrative of the inquiry. This understanding is informed by the view of Polkinhorne (1988) that a story is a 'single account intended to review life events in a true or imagined form'. He describes narrative as a 'scheme of multiple stories that organises events and human actions into a whole' (Polkinhorne 1988, p. 18). Bruner (2002) notes that linking connections between events as tales from life self-making narratives have as their purpose an endless tension of 'how things might have been or might still be' (p. 14). Similarly, reflection on my stories weaves past experiences with the present into a coherent narrative, opening possibilities for future action. I am aware as Bruner (2002, p. 21) notes that narrative 'is about plight, about the road rather than the inn to which it leads'. Narrative contributes to unfolding meaning and significance of reflections, through cognitive, symbolic and affective means (Charon 2006). Such knowledge contributes to expressing vision, guiding my practice which is always incomplete as narrative mirrors the reality of a 'concrete life space' (Polkinhorne 2010, p. 296). Generating knowledge through self-inquiry is beginning to appear across disciplines including education, nursing, clinical therapies, sociology, medicine and law (Lindsay 2006). Through this approach, I chart an individual journey of transformation moving from experience to creating a narrative guided by the work of Johns (2010) (see Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1, Creating my narrative

### **Narrative plot**

All good stories have a plot. The way that the narrative is produced is important (Wiklund et al. 2002). According to Polkinhorne (1988) a plot includes a specification of the problem to be solved, and how the actions are organised into a narrative with a beginning, middle and end. The point of the story needs to be made clear. Mattingly (1994, p. 28) comments that plot 'gives the outline which allows us to comprehend...in a succession of incidents in a single unified figure'. Plot continuously shifts as 'we live in the midst of unfolding stories over which we have partial control' (Mattingly 1994, p. 813). The point of the story was unclear to me for a long time. This is illustrated in the way the narrative is presented in Chapter 3, *Narrative*. It is only through an unfolding process that the essence of a concept unfolded as student kind. The concept itself shifted and moved as insights became less fuzzy. The detail of this process is revealed later in the narrative. Nevertheless there are challenges in presenting research in this way.



Bell (2002) highlights challenges in judging narrative inquiry through traditional methods, arguing that stakeholders may not 'embrace the insights drawn from such work'. However, is this not the very rationale for undertaking inquiry, as a contribution to debate? Taking a novel approach may challenge traditional views of research. While recognising, different ways of undertaking research, my thesis offers one way rather than the only way. As I struggled, to explain the influences constructing the narrative, while in Kerry, looking out a window (Plate 2.1) I wrote

Stone walls are built by hand without cement an ancient craft that can be altered and changed by the stonemason [bricoleur] without ever losing site of the purpose of the whole and perhaps that is enough.



Plate 2.1, Stone wall Ballintaggart House, Dingle, Co. Kerry, August 2011

### **Bricolage: philosophical influences**

Framing the philosophical approaches in a bricolage is a practical way of organising diverse and complementary views around what constitutes research (Berry 2006), Figure 2.2. Educationalist, Kincheloe (2004) argues that bricolage

supports knowledge, insights and practices connecting historical, intellectual and political landscapes where the research occurs. Furthermore, Warne and Mc Andrews (2009), from a nursing slant, argue for the use of such multiple ways, challenging assumptions in constructing new knowledge.

Bricolage is fluid, changing as research progresses, based on the notion that the object of the inquiry cannot be separated from the context, constructing new perceptions about self and others is fundamental to self-study. Kincheloe (2004) argues that bricolage offers a different way of seeing the interconnected nature of the world, acknowledging the complexity within human interactions, beyond the confines of a single disciplinary method. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest the bricoleur is a handyman [women] using available tools. Kincheloe (2004, p. 22) contends that a bricolage 'connects the research act to the heart of lived human experience'.



Figure 2.2, Bricolage: philosophical influences guiding narrative construction as described by Johns (2010)

Each element of the bricolage is valuable but insufficient for the inquiry. Literary and feminist texts<sup>22</sup> and writing on chaos theory by Wheatley (2006) thread their way through the thesis. Including, autoethnography, critical social science, and hermeneutic influences, builds on the strengths of each, creating a synergy, flowing from story to reflection creating a reflexive narrative.

### Autoethnography

Integral to reflexive narrative is self-transformation beyond autoethnography. Autoethnography, self-study, is grounded in story-telling, merging connections between self, art, experience and theory through the crafting of evocative texts (Holmen Jones (2005), towards developing social understanding (Ellis and Bochner 2004). A view supported by Pinar (2001) commenting that exposing our individual, social and political positions assists in developing critical consciousness. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note using self as the only data source has been questioned. An opinion recognised by autoethnographer, Sparkes (2000, p. 22), remarking that self-narratives have not been ‘trouble-free’, nor without critics. Specifically, Holt (2003) describes difficulties with publication in this genre, contesting that the difficulty relates to ‘suspicion’, of an approach when viewed with a traditional research lens. Holt (2003, p. 19) suggests that failing to go beyond description opens up the possibility of self-indulgence or at the extreme narcissism. Assertions of self-indulgence can be made, but these can be addressed within a reflexive narrative integral to Johns (2010) approach.

Through guidance the person is assisted to move from looking inwards, towards looking outwards, moving from personal to a cultural understanding of the world. The influence of autoethnography contributes to the crafting of the text in ‘show not tell’, sharing stories, opening a space for dialogue. Stories reveal, the personal becomes political and the political personal (Johns 2010, p. 19). Originally, I set out to learn about reflection and self. I did not set out to bring

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<sup>22</sup> Including Heaney, O’ Donohue, Okri, Woolfe, Belenky *et al*, Cixous, and others

about political change. The insights gained have given me a greater understanding of my world. I have learned much about self, much about my role as an educator in an organisation and far more about being with students.

#### Critical social science

The transformative element of narrative is guided by Fay's (1987) critical social science theory. Gaining an understanding of the context of the social world is central to the process of uncovering a vision for life, a first step in radically altering the self-destructive patterns of interaction that characterise social relations (Fay 1987)

Fay (1987) argues that for change to occur a person must work towards enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation. These are key underpinnings in Johns (2010) interpretation of reflection. Exposure of power imbalances, social and political influences are crucial to exploring creative tension in understanding. This is a prelude to taking action towards changing these conditions, enabling self-realisation.

The rational limit of change is described by Fay (1987) as embodiment, force and tradition. Considering each of these in relation to my practice identifies how I absorbed the rituals and habits of systems and patterns in transactional organisations. Through the narrative I demonstrate how nurse education takes a 'maternal approach' to student learning, fostering dependency at the expense of independence, with less attention to the development of critical thinking practitioners. Freshwater (2002) argues that nursing is a subordinated group, claiming that nurses may be socialised into having no voice by nurse teachers who 'are themselves oppressed' (p.484).

Freshwater (2000) proposes that reflective practice may contribute to an awareness of such forces, in this way, moving from frustration and helplessness

towards seeking ways to manage these tensions toward social action. Furthermore, insights from my reflection, foster interactions between nurse educators and students as caring encounters that 'celebrate the best ethical self and a hope for the good of the other thus paralleling the process of nursing as a caring activity' (Freshwater 2000, p. 484).

#### Hermeneutic perspective

Phenomenology focuses on the lived experience, recognising the significance of the embodied and inter subjective life world. 'Being in the world' connects mind and body, lived experience and historical and social contexts of experience (Heidegger 1962). Phenomenologist, Heidegger (1962) focuses on the nature of understanding whereas Gadamer (1989) emphasises interpretation of texts. Gadamer's view matches beliefs underpinning the inquiry. Learning through reflection is based on describing and making sense of experiences, interpreting texts, discovering meaning without ever losing sight of the whole.

An element within hermeneutics, considers how our personal history, how prejudices of our past inform our present. Koch (1995) has written that a person has a pre understanding about the world, based on previous experience. This is the context for beginning with Chapter 1, *Setting out*. This beginning chapter describing my background, and my life influences is critical in providing the reader with space to consider personal and professional context essential in creating a coherent narrative.

Gadamer (1989) proposes that the only way to gain deep understanding of the influences of learning through experience is generated through dialogue. Johns (2010) approach to dialogue frames the construction of my reflexive narrative.

## Dialogue

David Bohm (1996) a physicist<sup>23</sup> writing on dialogue, espouses dialogue as a way to address and confront the problems of modern society, organisations and as a consequence create harmony in the world. Senge (2004) notes that true dialogue creates a sharing of multiple points of view leading to collective coherent ways of thinking through a non-judgemental curiosity with the primary purpose of seeing things as freshly and as clearly as possible. Actively engaging in collective participation through dialogue aims to encourage suspension of assumptions, creating thinking space towards shared meanings, getting to the roots of problems, paving a way to transformation.

The core dynamic of reflexive narrative construction is dialogue. This is illuminated through the use of six dialogical movements as devised by Johns (2010, p. 21).

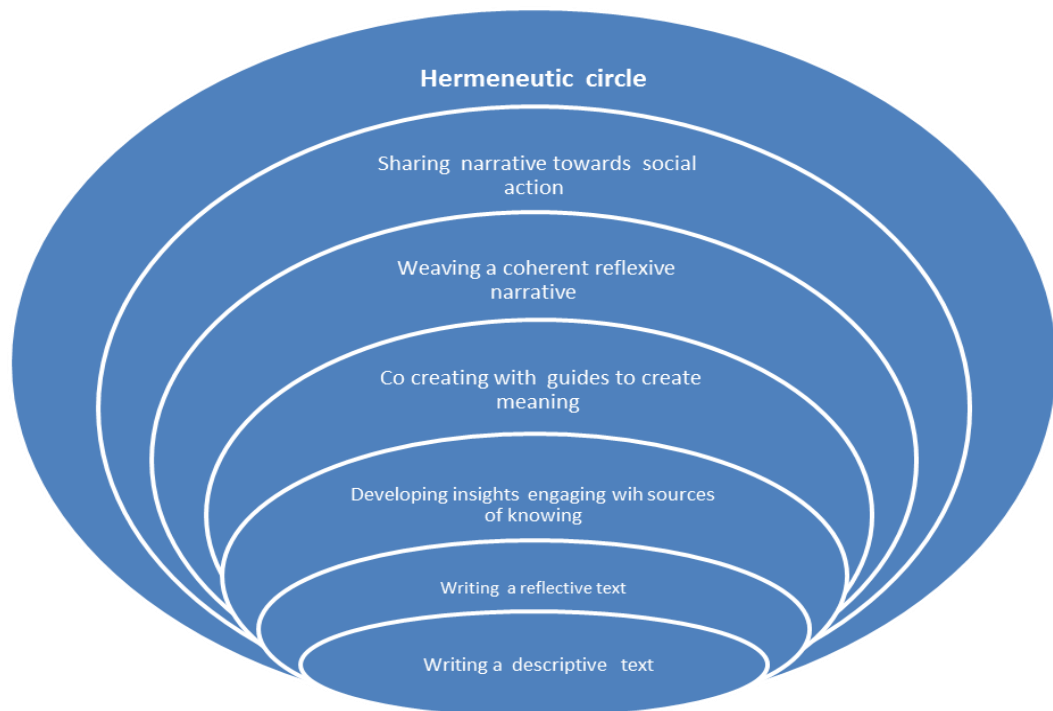


Figure 2.3, 6 dialogical movements of narrative construction adapted from the representation of Johns (2013).

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<sup>23</sup> Member of MIT Centre for Organisational learning, later became interested in Buddhism

I have adapted Johns' representation of the six movements which I describe in the next section. I describe how I have applied each step in my analytical approach. I begin by clarifying my understanding showing how each informs the other woven in a hermeneutic circle. Each step is individual but interlinked in a spiral of being and becoming. It is critical to be aware that the dialectic movement in my text is not neat, is arbitrary and may be contested as there is constant flow back and forth to the parts and the whole as in Gadamerian hermeneutics (Austgard 2012).

I have provided a more detailed illustration on the six movements in Table 2.1. This identifies the nature of the elements in each movement.

	Dialogical movement	Key criteria	Processes
1	Dialogue with self, writing a descriptive account.	Authenticity	Journal writing
2	Dialogue with story, creating a reflective text	Systematic process of reflection	Using the Model of Structured Reflection (MSR)
3	Dialogue with tentative insights and other sources of knowing	Validity	Engaging with literature Guidance
4	Dialogue with guides and peers to develop and deepen insights	Co-creating meaning	Dialogue
5	Dialogue with text, weaving a coherent and reflexive narrative	Reflexivity Narrative criteria	Co-creation Being Available Template Narrative
6	Dialogue with others, narrative theory, hermeneutics	Authenticity/ worthiness/engagement performance criteria	Guide, reader and writer dialogue

Table 2.1, The 6 dialogical movements (Johns 2010, p. 266)

## Using the 6 dialogical movements approach

### 1<sup>st</sup> Dialogue movement: writing a story text

Self-inquiry is a search for authenticity in being and becoming a reflective educator. I begin a dialogue with self, aware that my view is partial, writing a story, written in my style, my language. This approach to writing is described by Cixous (1991)<sup>24</sup> asking:

Who is the writer or author of the text? I work by way of language, by voice, by music, not only work but am written by a certain type of language (Cixous 1991, p. 11).

Cixous (1991) describes an embodied approach where

writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it...write yourself: your body must make itself heard (p. 35).

Within narrative Johns draws on Wilber (1995, p. 115)

we are dealing, not so much with exterior and observable behaviour but with interior states, and the only way you and I can get at each other's interiors is by dialogue and interpretation... yet, when you report to me your inner status, you might be lying to me... The validity claim here is not so much whether my statements match exterior facts, but whether I can truthfully report on my own inner status.

Key to self-inquiry is the response to the question -why would a person create a narrative based on untruths? Awareness that a truth can be contested, acknowledges that there are truths about self that I have yet to find, as Wilber (1995) notes 'you might be lying to yourself'. Why would I mislead readers? What would the point be of falsifying stories committed to an inquiry spanning six years? I aim to be genuine, sharing, co-creating experiences. My journey towards understanding begins with revealing self in interaction with students. I have responsibility to seek, find and tell truth as I see it, giving voice to my experience, giving voice to student struggles, aware of responsibility to myself

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<sup>24</sup> Hélène Cixous, French writer exploring gender and feminine writing.



for my actions. As O'Donohue writes 'we are privileged, and the duty of privilege is absolute integrity'.<sup>25</sup>

### Journaling

Self-dialogue through journaling is a cognitive, creative, emotive activity involving all the senses. Journaling begins with describing experience, accessing, and remembering, composing text. This is the basis of the raw data of my inquiry illuminated in Chapter 3, *Narrative*. This is informed by the idea that writing expands our thinking, discovering what we have to say and how we express ideas (Higgs *et al.* 2009, p. 328).

Moon (1999) an educationalist, suggests journaling has many purposes. These are summarised by Jasper (2003) within a nursing context; learning about one's self and one's practice, professional development, facilitating learning, developing reflective practice. These elements are embedded in the data a starting point in meeting the aims of my inquiry.

I first used the term 'journal' when studying.<sup>26</sup> My use of the term journal is informed by Holly (1988)

as a record of happenings, thoughts and feelings... a diary of practice, but in addition includes deliberative thought and analysis related to practice (p. 78).

I follow the journaling style outlined by Palmer *et al.* (1994). I begin, jotting down words freely, disregarding conventions of grammar and syntax. I write on one side of the page, leaving space on the other for further reflection. This tactic gives space, to return to earlier writing, beginning a dialogue with self, adding to what I have written (Jasper 2011). I have filled several journals; some were given as gifts by friends. Pages often have single words, doodles and diagrams. I have also used simple prose poetry to understand experiences. I don't pay attention

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<sup>25</sup> [www.johnodonohue.com](http://www.johnodonohue.com) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013]

<sup>26</sup> BNS degree, registration as a nurse tutor

to the accuracy of the recall, aware that I am not report writing. I choose instead to go where my thoughts and feelings take me. I have found writing cathartic, differing from Newell's (1992) claim that hindsight bias may affect memory and stress may be aroused from returning to painful experiences or dwelling on a negative side of reflective journaling.

Since 2008, keeping a reflective journal has become a continuous part of my daily life. I have written detailed descriptions of experiences, guided by feedback from our reflective community of inquiry (explored later). Initially I struggled in finding a personal style. Over time, I became aware of a contradiction. I realised that I often procrastinated with writing, caught up in busy world. I became familiar with my tendency to get side tracked, frustrated, putting my journaling on hold when life was chaotic. l'Aiguille (1994) describes similar feelings.<sup>27</sup> Slowly, I began to pay attention to these avoidance strategies, taking time, creating routines.

Journaling has become a purposeful activity, taking time to compose mind and body ready to ponder over experience. An Irish poet once said: 'the thing about writing is that, if you have the impulse, you will find the time' (Heaney 2002).<sup>28</sup> Routine has become an important element for me. Sometimes, early in the morning I walk over the bridge on the campus, clearing the fog in my head, avoiding getting caught up in the relentless stress of work. This routine balances competing demands of teaching, administration and research. Johns (2009, p. 49) too notes that writing in the evening provides opportunity to 'dwell' with ideas and consider events over the day. At this time there may be greater learning opportunities with less distraction from day to day life. Journaling is now part of my life, a starting point as Heaney notes

the vocation entails the disciplining of a habit of expression until it becomes fundamental to the whole conduct of life (Heaney 2002, p. 38).

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<sup>27</sup> Comment in the first text I read on reflective practice, Palmer et al. (1994)

<sup>28</sup> Heaney, S (2002) *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971–2001*, London: Faber and Faber

Reflective writing has also been described by Jasper (2011, p. 63) as a way of writing that helps: to foster 'empathy, emotional equilibrium, self-healing capacity and well-being'. Jasper adds that paying attention to these attributes may not be developed in a system with a focus on the technical and rational education.

This view has relevance for me moving from the journal entry to the computer where I start working with words expressing emotions, sadness and frustration. I scroll up and down the computer screen, back and forth, writing, moving text, editing as the text lengthens and meanders slowing down my thinking, 'bring the mind home'.<sup>29</sup> Gradually things that might seem unimportant come to the fore. I now see my journal as part of me, a personal space to pause, express feelings, ponder, reconsider and experiment beyond the actual writing towards seeing an experience from different lens with a more critical eye, as the next dialogical movement begins. I described my way in a poem in the style of Heaney's *Digging*<sup>30</sup>

Between my finger and my thumb  
The pen escapes me  
Writing is fundamental  
Writing is lonesome  
Searching for meaning  
In the stillness of the night  
Staying with the story  
Discovering the art of expression  
Finding the ink  
Finding the flow  
Grasping the stylus  
Creating ethereal magic  
Revealing  
Finding my thumb print.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The first cue in the Model of Structured Reflection (Johns 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Heaney, S. (1966) *Digging Death of a Naturalist* London: Faber and Faber

<sup>31</sup> *Rigor Mortis* Reflection 6 written when struggling to write January 2009

This thesis is based on nineteen reflections selected from 26 reflections I have written and shared over six years. These reflections were all posted on our Narrative Google Group that I described earlier, forming the narrative of this thesis. Three additional reflections are included in the Appendices 2, 3 and 4 to illustrate approaches to writing. At the beginning, each reflection was written as a singular random experience, rather than bringing previous learning and concerns from the past into the present. Not all journal entries were developed into reflective texts.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Dialogue movement: writing a reflective text**

Greater coherence is achieved if reflective writing is systematic, moving from a writing a story to dialogue with story, using the Model of Structure Reflection framework (MSR) (Johns 2010) creating a reflective text. In so doing, I sought insight through guidance aiming to understand my reality. The use of the MSR enabled greater understanding and less self-distortion. Such processes enhance deeper reflection. Once I have written a journal text I stand back and engage in hermeneutic dialogue using versions of Johns' MSR.<sup>32</sup> This model has undergone many revisions from the first version constructed in 1991. Over the course of the inquiry various versions were used. I began with the 12<sup>th</sup> version using the cues as headings in a prescriptive step by step way to the model in early reflections. My use of the MSR gave me structure at the beginning, but this then led me to compartmentalise the experience rather than holding the experience as a story in its entirety in a meaningful way, for example see *Ag Tabhart Aire* (Appendix 2).

Persistence and practice in writing and guidance led to a more holistic approach, using the MSR in an enabling way, as intended by Johns. By this I mean I have not followed each cue in order of appearance. I tune into different elements in a heuristic way, rather than as a prescribed or ordered check list. Johns (2013, p.

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<sup>32</sup> With the story text as a systematic process of reflection to gain insight [produce a reflective text]

47) accepts that a tendency to compartmentalise may be used by novices before internalising cues and cautions that

stage models immediately present reflection as some technical linear task... the risk is that practitioners will fit their experience to the model of reflection rather than use the model creatively to guide them to see self within the context of the particular experience (Johns 2013,p. 36).

Gradually stories were informed by previous experiences, a more questioning position evident as I searched beneath the surface of experience. I have seen a shift in my approach in how I am with students. My transformation surfaces with a more mindful reflective stance in later reflections, for example see *Come to the edge*.<sup>33</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> version is less linear and for me, offers a visual presentation that seems easier to work through as I became familiar with the language and underpinning concepts. Cues within the latest MSR are grouped here and used for reasons of currency (Table 2.2).

Preparatory phase: Bring the mind home
Descriptive phase
Reflective phase
Anticipatory phase
Insight phase

Table 2.2, Model of Structured Reflection (Edition 16) (Johns 2013, p. 37-38)

I have used the five phases of the model to explore underlying cues where I found them useful and or where I found challenges troublesome.

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<sup>33</sup> Reflection 14

Preparatory phase: bring the mind home

This phase is a starting point, slowing down thinking, getting in touch with an experience. Only then I start a description of the experience creating a story. I use the environment, nature, a walk over the bridge at work or the beach as cues. The cues trigger awareness in moving from being anxious to developing poise while with students who are struggling. In *Finding the space for communion*<sup>34</sup> I note the value of taking

time to pause and enjoy the panorama view as I walk across the bridge.

It is good to keep these thoughts to the forefront in my mind and enjoy the moment and I feel my body become less numb as I begin to look forward to the meeting.

Descriptive phase

The attention moves to consider an experience that seems significant. Johns (2013) suggests that a balance is struck between affirming experiences and those that were problematic, that seemed significant in some way (Johns 2009, p. 51). This was challenging. I asked the question - how did I know an experience was significant? Initially I concentrated on description, rather than responding to this cue, struggling to make sense of my feelings underneath the experience. Working out the essence of significance to insight has been critical to deepen reflection enabled through guidance.

Reflective phase

Attending to the reflective phase prompts me to explore stories from as many dimensions as possible. I pay attention to feelings, intentions, my responses and connection with previous experiences

- What were the consequences of my actions on the student,<sup>35</sup> others and myself ?

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<sup>34</sup> Appendix 4 January 2009

<sup>35</sup> I use student instead of patient which is used in all versions of the MSR, which up to now has mostly been used by healthcare practitioners such as Jarrett and Fordham

- To what extent did I act for the best and in tune with my values?

This cue was useful in unravelling my beliefs around students, nurse education and learning strategies.

- What knowledge did or might have informed me?

I referred to literature in all of my reflections but used literature in a descriptive, accepting manner. CJ during guidance challenged me throughout with comments like

- Dialogue with the literature - question it
- What are the claims you are making....?
- They are just quotes, what do they mean in relation [to your reflection]
- How does this situation connect with previous experiences?

I was slow to embrace this cue in individual experiences only appreciating relevance when looking back. Certainly there is a shift from my 'maternal fix it', attempts to sort out the problem for students, to a more dialogical presence where I have overcome my anxiety and feelings of being out of my depth. Instead I chose to listen, connecting with students.

CJ questioned what assumptions governed my practice and what factors influenced the way I feel, think and respond to particular situations. This cue is more explicit leading me as a practitioner towards using the influences grid. This is critical in understanding the messy world of working in organisations and essential to demonstrating transformation.

#### Anticipatory phase

This phase highlights the essence of reflexive narrative whereby the past informs the present opening up hermeneutic dialogue and possibilities for future practice development.

- How might I reframe the situation in order to respond more effectively?
- What factors might constrain me responding in new ways?

Cues challenge self and practice, key to Johns (2013) understanding of deeper reflection. These elements overlap in the dialogical movements assisting development of concepts as ephemeral as insight, meriting a specific phase.

#### Insight phase

The specific attention to insight helps in my struggle with significance to insight. Originally, I focused on finding experiences that I thought were worth writing about, then on writing, describing rather than addressing the point of reflection, gaining insight through reflexivity.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Dialogical movement: deepening insights, engaging with sources of knowing**

Tentative insights were explored in an open way framed with theory and wider literature. Through guidance I challenged my partial view as a narrator. This was critical in becoming aware of my assumptions, an interplay, between theory and experience.

Throughout this phase, I engage in dialogue between my tentative insights and potentially relevant literature in order to deepen my insights, positioning them within the wider community of knowing. In so doing I critique the literature for rigor and relevance. I pay attention to right and left brain thinking as a way to develop insights from experience. I am guided by Johns' (2013, p. 13) assertion that it is critical to appreciate 'among the sterility of reason when the human factor is often lost amongst the fact' I draw upon ancient Celtic wisdom finding inspiration in the works of Irish writers including O'Donohue in *Anam Cara*, Heaney, Okri, in *A Way of Being Free*. I am also informed by the writings of Wilber (1998) adding a unique dimension on human knowledge; Wheatley (2006) on chaos theory; Cope (2006) and Senge *et al.* (2004) on learning and working in organisations. Throughout Chapter 3 and in a more critical way in Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*, reference is made to these sources. These texts help my search for meaning through reflection on



experiences, accessing my tacit knowing finding my own language to express and write what I know. However, on occasions my sense of confusion was evident. I was uncertain of where I was going or how to get there. Johns (2010, p.31) describes the aim of reflective writing as 'opening a door of perception to new ways of being and responding'.

## Voice

I have considered a critical feminist perspective in a focus on voice informed by Belenky *et al.* (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing*. I have found this text valuable in exploring voice as a metaphor for empowerment (Johns 2013, p.9). Belenky *et al.* (1986) describe how women develop an informed and assertive voice through a series of five levels from silence, received, subjective, procedural to a final constructed knowledge. Constructing knowledge involves integrating voice as ways of knowing whereby

women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and where subjective and objective knowledge has value (Belenky *et al.* 1986, p. 15).

Belenky *et al.*'s framework has been useful as a way of considering my reflections, in relationship with students and colleagues. Earlier reflections raised the idea of a collaborative voice but as the narrative progresses I have refined and expanded a sixth level, a dialogical voice.

I had to learn to stand back and look at patterns in my experiences to look deeper to realise what I was avoiding or what troubled me. Instead of feeling personally affronted, or silenced, through reflection, I have become more empowered. While evidence for assertiveness ripples beneath the surface it is now forthcoming, as I gain greater insight and poise.

Guidance and engaging with literature reveals my 'maternal fix it mode' in relationship with students, flowing from being kind to students to engaging in

presence as described by Senge (2004) and Fay (1987). I now appreciate the complexity and patterns existing in organisations (Wheatley 2006). The stepping stones are a metaphor illustrating the narrative unfolding, as Seamus Heaney describes

a journey into the wideness of the world beyond... a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival whether in one's poetry or one's life turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination...<sup>36</sup>

Dialogue with these works helps make sense of experiences, guiding me to critical dialogue, gaining an appreciation of the intricacies in working in large organisations.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Dialogical movement: co-creating meaning**

The process of deepening insights is enhanced by participation within a community of inquiry where peers, supervisors and guides work together in dialogue. At each session we share our reflections, through guidance, paying attention to the significance of each experience in drawing out insights. Additionally there is an understanding between us, informed through a *lived human relation* with others in a hermeneutic circle of interpretation (van Manen 1990). This is described by Standing (2009) as an inter-subjective understanding and co-constituted meaning as a 'fusion of horizons'. Horizon is a metaphor for how we understand and interpret reality (Austgard 2010). Being aware that each part relates to the whole is essential in understanding how data is presented. Hence the narrative is presented as written rather than subjected to traditional thematic analysis, assisted through dialogue achieved through guidance.

#### **Guided reflection**

Guidance is essential to Johns (1994, 2010, 2013) interpretation of reflection. He advocates that dialogue in groups to enables practitioner learning. Platzer

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<sup>36</sup>From Nobel Prize acceptance speech 1995

(2004) reports that reflective groups may be a powerful way of helping nurses to reflect whereby there is

an openness to other perspectives and decreasing certainty in the idea that there are no right and wrong answers and an increased ability to tolerate uncertainty (Platzer 2004, p. 122).

Group work is underpinned by ground rules relating to respect and trust (Arnold and Boggs (1999). According to Rolfe *et al.* (2001, p. 113) successful engagement in group work requires the presence of therapeutic conditions of empathy, genuineness and respect. Dialogue as understood by Johns (2010) builds on Bohm's (1996) concept of presence, trust, flowing towards shared meaning. These concepts then create a space so that people are able to listen. I have described our reflective community in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*. Our community, is responsive to the needs of individuals, underpinned by the rules of dialogue as outlined by Johns (2009, 2013)

- commitment to work with others towards consensus for a better world
- awareness and suspension of one's assumptions and prejudices
- proprioception of thinking
- being open to possibility and free from attachment to ideas
- listening with engagement and respect
- having mutual appreciation of dialogue (Johns 2013, p. 20).

Meeting and engaging in dialogue informed by such rules aims to foster an environment for personal learning. Trust is a cornerstone of such community of learning requiring the expertise of a guide.

### Guiding

The guide fulfils many roles, balancing between support and challenge as the practitioner grapples with the tensions between the ideal view of self and the reality of daily practice, whereby reflection exposes self-distortion (Johns 2009, 2013). Being mindful and sensitive to the suffering of the other is a foreground to 'pulling away any masks that distort seeing self and reality for what it is'.

Bulman *et al.* (2013) identify the importance of a reflective learning environment which is dependent on a trusting relationship. Un-masking and stripping back beliefs around self, does not come without discomfort. Safety and authenticity is critical. Johns' pays attention to this element acknowledging that guidance

holds the practitioner along the journey and remoralises the demoralised and guides the practitioner with resolve to take action (Johns 2009, p. 86).

The cues in the MSR are triggers for self and used by guides at our sessions. Rolfe (2013)<sup>37</sup> too has spoken about the use of the MSR cues for the guide or supervisor. I now begin to see how I use these cues in a dialogical way engaging in reflective group work with students. This is further supported in earlier work by Bailey and Graham (2007) reporting on facilitating guided reflection with qualified nurses who described using reflective cues as part of daily work, typically at report time.<sup>38</sup>

Without guidance, reflection, as illustrated through my inquiry and as understood by Johns, is compromised and threatened. Therefore, guided reflection as a practice and research methodology requires organisational structure agreements and commitment in reaping rewards.

## Structure

Our reflective community group meets monthly, holding intensive research schools every year. Membership includes educators, and nurse practitioners undertaking PhD studies. Prof Johns is Director of Studies and guide, joined by other supervisors. I posted over 26 reflections to our Narrative Google group website. Before meeting, we read each posting, commenting, posing questions. At sessions we dialogue sharing sources, perspectives, supporting each other. I made over 35 trips. Over time, commitment to the inquiry was tested by

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<sup>37</sup> Presentation, 17<sup>th</sup> International Reflective Practice Conference, Swansea University, Wales 9-11<sup>th</sup> September 2013

<sup>38</sup> We worked with 6 palliative care nurses, meeting monthly, sharing reflections over a year and subsequently evaluated their experiences

practical struggles. Diminished financial support from my organisation, increasing work demands, timetable clashes impacted on my ability to join sessions. This is a contradiction in itself, as unless I participated my progress was hindered as evidenced in my reflection <sup>39</sup>

I come to Polhill,<sup>40</sup> it is soul food, nurturing, the guided sessions are always challenging comfortable amongst new found fellow travellers. Insights I witness is bedrock.

This aspect requires consideration in future development of guided reflective groups reaching across global communities. For me, support was about being present, picking up nuances of conversation.

Our group is based on a caring ethos fundamental to guidance in reflective practice. Even so, I have felt vulnerable when analysing and sharing incomplete raw reflections, uncomfortable when strangers [prospective students] joined our sessions. I understood visitors were interested in learning about our structure, but vulnerability is exposed when sharing with strangers, even while in a supportive environment like ours.

#### Significance to insight

Significance is a term with different meaning depending upon the position taken. In the formal sciences it is used in describing a statistical measure. A broader sense used for this inquiry indicates, 'meaningfulness or importance' (Polkinhorne 1988, p. 176).

The Oxford English Dictionary<sup>41</sup> defines insight as the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of something. Insight is a subtle shift from significance whereby I gain practical wisdom, about self and practice, generating new knowledge that informs my daily life. Johns (2009, p. 77) describes insights as

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<sup>39</sup> *Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust*, Reflection 5

<sup>40</sup> Sessions held at Polhill Campus, Bedford

<sup>41</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013]

‘inchoate’, tentative. They impact on future practice. The tentative nature of insights means that they are held loosely and not fixed, encouraging us to be open possibilities, searching for patterns never losing sight of the whole. Insights are about understanding empowerment and transformation (Johns 2013, p. 62).

#### Drawing out significance

Drawing out significance is enabled through dialogue and guidance as part of the supervision process. Taking this idea further Okri (1997) explains that reading, ‘therefore is co-production between writer and reader’ (p. 41). I revised and interpreted my data responding to questions raised and feedback. Deepening of insights in this way creates a space for conversation and experimentation that shapes meaning and understanding as evidenced in the following reflections.

Reflection: *Time for feedback or feed-forward after race*<sup>42</sup>

I begin to question my ‘silence’ my discomfort and how critical social theory (embodiment and tradition) influences my approach. I question the tension in giving feedback to students. I accepted and deferred to rules in the system rather than considering the student perspective. I ponder; my approach to giving feedback has become a habitual practice and the possibility of it becoming a routine for me and yet the significance for an individual student is anything but routine.

Reflection: *Tabhair dom do lámh [holding the hand]*<sup>43</sup>

I describe my experience of holding the hand of Eileen a women with dementia. I write about possibilities in sharing the experience with students, perhaps the insight gained from writing and sharing the story will become the basis for dialogue in educating students.

This first reflection is nevertheless a passive response. Through guidance I was asked to consider reading the story with students and this has now gained

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<sup>42</sup> Appendix 5, cv

<sup>43</sup> Reflection 1

greater significance in how I facilitate learning, beginning the module nursing the older person with a reading of *Tabhair dom do lámh*.

Reflection: *emails that we(d) read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to...*<sup>44</sup>

In responding to frustration about the number of emails and the problems therein I pen:

reconnecting... continuing to keep to the forefront an appreciation that behind the apparent lack of courtesy or the general feeling that these students are not really interested in the course ... there may be very valid reasons as to why they are falling behind and seem less than committed.

Reflection: *Finding my voice*<sup>45</sup>

In this later narrative I write of discomfort with thoughts that have come forth like a wave through my reflections when commenting I feel

Powerless,  
Alienated,  
Silenced.<sup>46</sup>

I return to Belenky *et al.* (1986) recognising my silent knowing, a significant stepping stone to understanding critical social theory (Fay 1987), considering how things are the way that they are. Empowered and realising my vision in a world of chaos informed by the works of Fay and Wheatley is an exciting possibility.

I wrote in *Finding my voice* 47

I sense I am beginning my quest and for the moment this is the start to my 'velvet glove' revolution.

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<sup>44</sup> Reflection 3

<sup>45</sup> Reflection 10

<sup>46</sup> Reflection 10

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

The above excerpts from Chapter 3, *Narrative* serve to illustrate the use of the dialogical movements in moving from significance towards insight. Detailed representations of insights interwoven with literature are examined in Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Dialogical movement: weaving a coherent and reflexive narrative**

Continuous journal writing; using reflective frameworks; interaction with literature; leading to insights are the foundation for the construction of the nineteen reflections which form the narrative. The 5<sup>th</sup> dialogical movement requires the looking back at these experiences. It requires thinking about experiences and my reflective text again with greater reflexivity; the creation of a narrative text demonstrating the meaning of experiences, and the plotting of the journey of my being and becoming.

#### **Selecting reflections**

Selecting reflections for inclusion was built around the principle of illuminating insights towards realising the appearance of student kind. By this I mean the reader can plot my transformation through the narrative, appreciating factors that challenged my journey.

The desire to plot my development was in contrast to any desire to place me, or the organisation, in a favourable light. Political and ethical sensitivity influenced selection. I present my claims for coherence and truth and approaches to ethical mindfulness which also influenced the selection of reflections.

The reflections that form the narrative are presented chronologically. This choice is linear but the reflections therein are by no means formulaic with texts varying in style and length. Some reflections are without structure, some meandering, showing reflection flowing from a beginning to where I am at this point in time. Editing other than typographical and formatting would have been a further



reflection on a reflection a move away from the original work. Thus reflections are presented in a raw format. Examples of editing are included in Appendix 6.

There are reflections that I like, but do not offer clarity. Feedback from guides and our community contributes to the authenticity of reflections as lived, generated from experiences. Such dialogue helps in coming to terms within the contradictions between my ideal view and reality of practice. This notion is the primary intention within dialogue enabling the co-creation of meaning, based on the premise of standing back from a reflection, posing the following cues,

What is the purpose in selecting a specific reflection?

What is the significance?

Where does it fit in with previous experience?

Developing analysis using the six dialogical movements is an intricate activity striving towards sense making of data. This co-creation of meaning whereby there is discovery and confusion, juxtaposed with clarity is critical to narrative construction. Yet, such ideals are difficult to show in any definitive way and hence there is an arbitrary nature to this process.

Significantly in an inquiry seeking a vision there needs to be a way to examine and give structure to how the practitioner can be available in *realising* a therapeutic relationship working in a modern organization. I have used the Being Available Template, devised by Johns (2010) as a starting point to access what is hidden to me within my experiences, guiding me towards desirable practice.

#### Being Available Template

The being available template considers six interrelated elements including vision, knowing the person, compassion, aesthetic knowing, poise and creating and sustaining an environment where being available is possible.

The template was reflexively devised through engaging with practice as a framework that reflected the essential nature of desirable practice. This template offers the practitioner a framework to judge the extent to which the practitioner has realised holistic practice (Johns 2013). The template is underpinned by the claim that the essential characteristic of holistic practice is

the practitioner being available to help the person requiring care to find meaning in their health–illness experience, to help the person make best decisions about their life and health and to respond with appropriate action to help the person meet their health needs (Johns 2006, p. 21).

This template is about the central nature of therapeutic practice. However teaching can also be viewed as humanistic practice. I am aware that as with any framework there is always the risk of forcing a fit of the practitioner’s development into a framework. Johns (2002) cautions about this and advises a healthy scepticism encouraging creativity and expansion.

The template has been reviewed continuously over the last twenty years (Johns 2013, p. 67). The sequence, language and presentation of the template have evolved.<sup>48</sup> The latest version develops the significance of each factor paying greater attention to development (Johns 2013). I applied the template to my inquiry within the context of nurse education. The following table describes the template (Table 2.3) outlining the versions and showing where I have adapted and expanded the template. The final column in the table illustrates how I have interpreted the framework and given structure to my work. This is critical to an appreciation of how my narrative plot, becoming student kind unfolds and is sustained.

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<sup>48</sup> Bullet points (2005), a circle within a series of ovals (2006), open table (2013).

Johns (2002)	Significance of each factor (Johns 2013)	Johns (2005, 2006, 2013)	Adapted
Practitioner knows what is desirable	Vision gives purpose and direction to practice. Holding intent, the practitioner is more likely to realise the vision in practice	More explicit use of realising a vision	Realising vision  Becoming student kind  Integral to person centred nursing
Practitioner knows the person	Through empathic inquiry the practitioner appreciates the pattern of the person's wholeness and the meaning they give to health. It is tuning in and flowing with the unfolding a pattern of the person's experience	Life pattern  Empathic inquiry	Knowing the other
Practitioner is concerned for the person	Concern for the other and compassion is caring energy. Concern creates possibility within the caring relationship. The greater the practitioner's concern for the other, the more available the practitioner is	Compassion	Concerned  Compassionate
The aesthetic response	Five abilities constitute effective performance:  1 ability to grasp and interpret the clinical moment  2 ability to manage the advocacy – enablement tension  3 ability to make most appropriate & ethical clinical judgement  4 ability to respond with appropriate skilful action to assist the person to meet their health needs  5 the ability to evaluate one's efficacy	Decision making	Meeting the person's  Needs as best as possible
Practitioner knows & manages herself within relationships	The practitioner knows and manages self within relationships so that their personal concerns do not interfere with being available to the person. It is the flip side of compassion; where compassion makes the practitioner vulnerable, poise manages the vulnerability	More explicit as poise / emotional intelligence	Poised
Practitioner can create and sustain an environment where being available is possible	This includes such factors as  Creating and sustaining collaborative and assertive patterns of relationships with other health care workers towards realising a shared vision of practice.  Being political to maximise available resources to ensure availability to the patient and counter coercive patterns of management  Collaborative attitude and skill to manage conflict  Having a constructed voice (Belenky et al. (1986).	Inclusion of voice and conflict frameworks	Creating and sustaining a learning environment

Table 2.3, Being Available Template (Johns 2013)

While each element can be addressed individually each can be seen within a pattern that connects each element. Josselson (2013) describes the circular nature of such interweaving through a hermeneutic lens when noting that

hermeneutics is about meaning making describes the idea that the whole must be understood in relation to the parts, which drive their meanings,...from our understanding of the whole-an interpretation that then furthers our grasp of the meanings of the parts and so on (Josselson 2013, p. 8).

I was careful to resist making my core expression of my inquiry becoming student kind fit into the Being Available Template, while at the same time finding its structure useful. Nevertheless there is some overlap and repetition within sections and I have tried to use it in the spirit of clarifying student kind as an irreducible whole rather than a list of qualities. My representation of The Being available Template is represented in Chapter 4 *Being and becoming student kind*

### Coherence

Moving through existing and emerging horizons; reading, listening, writing; leads to a fusion of the inquiry and reflection itself. Such a methodical process offers a purpose beyond simple description revealing a 'story of a significant kind' (Wiklund *et al.* 2002, p. 119) and ultimately 'a coming to be of being' (Vedder 2002, p. 207). The methodology approach requires remaining open throughout to emerging ideas on narrative structure.

Clough (2000), asserts that there are no rules, for judging a coherent reflexive narrative. The writer aims to establish the quality of a narrative for the reader throughout the narrative. Reflexivity, looking back, connecting experiences, making sense of emerging insights, is a key way of establishing whether the inquiry forms a logical, unified whole. The final work according to Koch and Harrington (1998, p. 889) resembles a

thoughtfully constructed tapestry. Its appreciation will rely upon each needle point and the craft of the makers.

Integrity is central to all narrative; the writer describes for the reader what is going on, giving a sense that the narrative can be trusted. Johns (2010, p. 262) advocates self-inquiry 'must always be a genuine self-inquiry.' As Koch and Harrington (1998, p. 889) maintain a project is credible, when the 'work is engaging... sharing the interpretive reflective turns of its makers'.

In supporting such claims several terms are used across paradigms - truth, rigour, authenticity, credibility, validity, trustworthiness (Denzin 2005, Morse and Field 1996 Rolfe 2006). As Johns writes coherence

sets the tone of the hermeneutic spiral of being and becoming, where insights gained through the dialogical movements are woven into the reflexive narrative (Johns 2010, p. 262).

In this way, coherence addressed in the 5<sup>th</sup> movement weaves throughout, the inquiry. Establishing coherence in narrative seeks meaning and understanding of insights. Presenting my journey is not simple, given narrative is a search for knowing which 'grows out of context embedded in data' (Lather 1986, p. 25). The non-linear nature of narrative represents a world grounded in reality. It is often chaotic and contradictory with fragmented patterns representing wholeness, showing coherence, presented as a series of reflections unfolding. I return to Johns (2010), drawing upon Lather's (1993) work, refining validity<sup>49</sup> through the metaphor, rhizomatic validity

there is no trunk, no emergence from a single root, but rather arbitrary branching off elements ...where any concept, when pulled, is recognised as connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field (Johns 2010, p. 680).

In this manner, narrative is held together loosely by plot that is not neatly, marked drawing together the hermeneutic circle. Challenges in presenting such

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<sup>49</sup> Originally Lather (1986) identified face, construct and catalytic validity, later subsumed into rhizomatic validity (Lather 1993)

narratives are addressed by Richardson (2000a), encouraging the use of artistic dimensions in capturing authenticity, ambiguity, complexity of the real world.

I endeavour to construct a narrative, representing my experiences rather than 'reworking' data so that it would be in line with the researchers' pre-established framework or theoretical interest (Jones *et al.* 2014, p. 37). Hence, in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*, I position myself as an inquirer within a self-inquiry. I strive to interrogate my narrative without distorting the data as Fay (1987, p. 174) comments

the process of understanding ourselves can never achieve finality, but is always unfolding and always being revised.

Highlighting the tension between rationality, emotion and self- knowledge, Fay (1987, p. 174) continues

We will always be a constant question to ourselves, enigmas who seek self-definition and self-knowledge but who are condemned to relative opacity which makes us continually wonder who we are and what we can become.

Challenging words, I have learned as in Rilke's<sup>50</sup> advice

Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

This is ever evolving process of looking back through my narrative, plotting appearance of self-realisation, through dialogue and guidance. Coherence opens space, refining my understanding of multiple realities, appreciating the tension along a subjective objective path. As Fay (1987, p. 168) writes

no narrative of actual lives can ever be characterised as 'the genuine one'. The results of human activities are forever occurring, so that any narrative about them must be inherently fragmentary and tentative.

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<sup>50</sup>Rilke,R.M.(1934) Letters to a Young Poet: <http://www.aracnet.com/~maime/rilke4.html>  
[Accessed 1st March 2014]

Establishing coherence, seeking integrity and truthfulness, is constant in self-inquiry.<sup>51</sup> I have described this in the following haiku

Dialogical dance of the art of coherence  
Pull of tradition  
Guiding star of truthfulness  
Dancing dialogue on springtide

I put forward the view that for me coherence is a dance, searching for meaning as Yeats writes 'how can we know the dancer from the dance'.<sup>52</sup> Representing the nature of being and becoming a reflective nurse educator, expressing a vision of becoming student kind is complex. In establishing coherence the reader is invited to consider narrative inquiry prompted by Johns (2010, p. 271) use of Richardson's (2000b) benchmark question<sup>53</sup> asking does the narrative,

Make a substantive contribution to an understanding of social life.

Does the narrative seem real and true?

Have aesthetic merit- artistic and engaging?

Reflect the narrators reflexivity in telling her story of being and becoming in ways true to herself and her reality?

Have emotional and intellectual impact moving the reader into self- reflection, new perspectives and action? (Johns 2010, p. 271).

In essence I take a practical approach to showing coherence and integrity through the narrative. Johns (2010) dialogical movements gave me some structure. At the same time, I try to resist falling into trap of replacing one set of criteria with another, mindful of Clough's (2002) caution against a

return to a methodological policing... await, a time of waiting to be influenced by the inchoate sights and sounds coming from the future (p. 290-291).

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<sup>51</sup> Winter Research School 2012

<sup>52</sup> Yeats, W.B. (1928) Among school children in *Tower* New York: Scribner [2004]

<sup>53</sup> Critical Analytic Processes in ethnography whereby the narrator moves beyond social scientific writing adapting to a world of uncertainty into a tentative positioning of self to represent their journeys of reflexivity of self-inquiry (Johns 2010, p. 274)

## **6<sup>th</sup> Dialogical movement: sharing stories towards social action.**

Following the creation of the narrative revealing self in imperfect humaneness, it is then essential to present the work to be shared and read critically bringing about social action. Creating a forum for dialogue enables interaction between self and the reader, and can offer further insight. This idea is expressed by Kearney (2002, p. 156) quoted at the outset of the chapter. Johns (2010) suggests that it is the responsibility of the narrator to write the story in a way that the reader can relate to and make sense of the narrative. Achieving such harmony is intangible as Polkinghorne (1988) notes,

the writer and the reader now also function as parts in a whole communication event that occurs when the created narrative text is taken to be understood by different individuals (p. 99).

Writing, reading and responding to narrative is a personal act of co-creation. The reader reads from their personal view and stories may connect with similar experiences.

### **Sharing stories**

I share my reflections and insights creating space for readers and listeners to consider my reflection. Responding through dialogue provides further space and opportunities entering into the hermeneutic circle, co-producing meaning, fusing horizons (Gadamer 1989). Thus the reader or listener is an active participant bringing their unique experience interweaving their response with my original text co-producing meaning. Such dialogue aims to move towards a better world (Bohm 1996). Sharing of texts is informed by autoethnography (Bochner and Ellis 2002). Stephen Grosz (2013) writing from a psychoanalysis view comments in *The Examined life* that

We are all storytellers - we make stories to make sense of our lives. But it is not enough to tell tales. There must be someone to listen (Grosz 2013, p.1).



Chase (2005, p. 671) challenges that research narratives

incite collective action... how can researchers help to create the conditions of empathetic listening across social locations?

I am a reluctant performer declining centre stage as illustrated in a *Week in the life of*<sup>54</sup> when I prefer others to take the lime light. I preferred being back stage instead of doing a radio interview. Despite such reluctance I did the radio interview. The value of audience performance is evident when listening to presentations by colleagues Fordham and Jarrett. I have witnessed performances by Johns,<sup>55</sup> Nunes and Price sharing expertise on dance, writing and performance theatre at workshops. I seek possibilities as Bochner and Ellis (2002, p. 3) suggest crossing 'boundaries between social science, literature and the arts' in making the personal political like ripples in the ocean.

Presenting stories

I presented *Finding my voice*<sup>56</sup> building on a reflection *She should leave she is a disgrace*<sup>57</sup> at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Reflective Practice Conference.<sup>58</sup> I shared my experience of working with a student in difficulty and where there was pressure from stakeholders with likelihood that the student would be exited from the programme. I used images of nature and my poem that opens *The tide turns towards transformation*<sup>59</sup> to illustrate the reflection. I raised questions about the student as a person in an organisational system. Whereby, on the one hand the organisation is committed to the quality of the student experience, while on the other hand taking a punitive approach. As the presentation finished colleagues commented:

Thought provoking

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<sup>54</sup> Reflection 19

<sup>55</sup> Raw International Reflective Practice Conference Aalborg June 2007 and Rotorua New Zealand September 2008

<sup>56</sup> Reflection 10

<sup>57</sup> Reflection 9

<sup>58</sup> University of Bedfordshire, Luton June 2010

<sup>59</sup> Reflection 11

It's about caring for students for them to become carers

A dean from another college raised concerns regarding my position in balancing my role as an advocate and the risks associated with raising awkward questions.

When I read *Tabhair dom do lámh*<sup>60</sup> a colleague was moved to tears, commenting that the story 'brought back memories of what for her nursing has lost'.

Feedback from my experience of reading my first reflection *Tabhair dom do lámh* with students has led to dialogue around caring and dementia informing my facilitation of learning. Collaborating with practice led to a DVD shared at the *Life Long Learning Festival*.<sup>61</sup>

A presentation *Holding a hand an expression of intent*<sup>62</sup> based on my first reflection, drawing on *A week in the life [exploring being and becoming]*<sup>63</sup> was presented at the International Reflective Practice Conference.<sup>64</sup> Initially there was silence with very little commentary. Was my reflection inaccessible, did I fail to create a space for dialogue? Afterwards, individuals came to me saying,

I could not talk when your paper was finished I am choked up.

Your presentation has made my shiver, and think about lecturers and the rat race.

This makes me think about how I teach it's so close.

I gather courage, submitting abstracts. I facilitated a seminar<sup>65</sup> with clinical placement coordinators,<sup>66</sup> responding to an invitation from our regional centre

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<sup>60</sup> Reflection 1 describing my experience of being with a woman with dementia

<sup>61</sup> DVD developed with colleague Dymphna Tuohy, a practitioner and complementary therapist and AV teams. We organised a workshop for a *Lifelong Learning Festival* community event with local a carers association.

<sup>62</sup> Presentation at Swansea University International Reflective Practice Conference September 2014

<sup>63</sup> Reflection 19

<sup>64</sup> Swansea University, Swansea September 2013

<sup>65</sup> Invited Workshop September 2013

<sup>66</sup> CPC's provide support for students on placement

for education and practice development. This is the first phase of a strategic response to a site visit report from An Bord Altranais.<sup>67</sup> The seminar was based around sharing a reflection *Honour thy mother*<sup>68</sup> about reflective writing and participants, generating dialogue about how reflection comes from practice. A colleague, comments,

the session has summersaulted ideas about teaching around experience and dialogue rather than beginning with theory.

Including aesthetic sources in my narrative opens 'different avenues of relationship' (Bochner and Ellis 2002). Blending performance art and social science overcomes binary divides (Conquergood 1985). These presentations, however, cannot be represented adequately in written form devoid of context and people. I suggest that such stories fulfil the aim of reflective texts as being transgressive making little ripples along the way, challenging taken for granted assumptions. Unless we examine practice in this way there is no point to story (Johns 2013, p. 15). Okri (1997, p. 63) expands

without extending some hidden or visible frontier of the possible, without disturbing something of the incomplete order of things, there is no challenge and no pleasure and certainly no joy.

My intention is not to cause distress but rather disquiet, evoking a cognitive and emotional response drawing on the senses in a renewing way. I acknowledge that stories can be seductive and that a balance is needed between emotional and cognitive responses.

Sharing stories invites the reader to

Comprehend /appreciate/experience the activities of and subjectivities of marginalised groups or particular individuals – full stop (Bochner and Ellis 2002, p. 3).

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<sup>67</sup> Programme accreditation visit to university and partnership services 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Reflection 8

A reflexive narrative aims to go a step further in dialogue bringing about social action. In this way the reader draws upon their personal experience engaging in personal reflection fusing interpretation. Sharing my stories using a dialogical voice aims to create space for listeners to reconsider how students are seen as individuals, as carers. It also creates space to ponder on creating a learning environment to enable students to reach their potential as practitioners. I have no way of knowing if these little ripples extend beyond the moment of co-creation.

Constructing a representation of a reflexive narrative is about shifting lens looking at the parts in relation to the whole, ebbing and flowing, illustrated in the following photographs taken at a place where I have done much of my thinking.



Plate 2.2, Stones on Ventry beach, Co. Kerry July 2013



Plate 2.3, Ventry beach with ebbing tide.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are essential to inquiry, grounded in stories related to my everyday world with the emphasis on 'me' and my learning within a nurse educator role. Traditionally research ethics emphasise approval procedures from research ethics committees. Approval procedures have been informed by experimental research. More recent discussion includes situational ethics within qualitative research (Guillemin and Heggen 2011). I follow the Code of Professional Conduct (An Bord Altranais 2000) and procedures and guidelines associated with university research ethics committees, using the word ethical mindfulness as a way of being throughout the work.

I appreciate that concerns regarding ethics and reflective practice are contentious across the personal, social and political contexts with individual, students, colleagues and the organisation as a whole. Ghaye (2011) proposes that all reflective writing has the potential for dilemmas including

professional competence, interpersonal conflicts, fairness, conflicting loyalties, discipline and encroachment on personal liberty (Ghaye 2011, p. 154).

In accordance with best practice an ethical scrutiny RS1 form<sup>69</sup> (Appendix 3) was submitted and supported. Ethical considerations move beyond formal approval processes, enacted by paying continuous attention to managing tension between authentic text construction and protection of the rights of individuals. Ellis (2007, p. 4) describes a relational ethics of care in autoethnography, which behoves the researcher to be 'true to one's character and responsible for one's action and their consequence on others'. Central to my inquiry is a duty of care, intending no harm to any individual, while preserving the integrity of the narrative. Being ethically mindful, I take responsibility to self-regulate throughout the inquiry, guided by the ethical principles related to anonymity, confidentiality, respect, dignity and privacy.

Journaling requires care in handling and storing my personal and private manuscripts. I keep mine at home,<sup>70</sup> for reasons of safety and privacy. In the reflections I have maintaining anonymity in line with An Bord Altranais (2000) principles. Preservation of these principles is underpinned by Ghaye's (2007, p. 158) approach describing ethical relationships based upon 'respect for the Other'. I am guided by the underpinning principle that the inquiry is about me and my work and how I respond to situations rather than a record of other people's perceptions. I am careful, aware that I write about other people as though reading about self.

Being constantly aware of human vulnerability and sensitivity demands attention in the writing of any dilemmas that may occur and the manner by which they are resolved. While this is my story, it may be perceived as revelations about others and hence I read carefully my reflections as if I was 'the Other'.

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<sup>69</sup> RSI application for Research Degree Programme Approval Form and RSI Ethics Research Scrutiny University of Bedfordshire

<sup>70</sup> Kept in my den, electronic versions on password protected laptop.

Respect and dignity connects every aspect of the narrative. I strive to be sensitive to individuals and organisations, respecting boundaries throughout the study (Manias and Street 2001). Representations of individuals, place, as identifiers are protected. No real names of persons appear in the thesis and pseudonyms are used throughout. I have changed names, gender and time. Only material that is in the public domain is used from an organisational perspective. An exception to the use of real names is the reference to individuals in my reflective community and in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*.

The ethical considerations in reflexive narrative have parallels within autoethnography. I follow Ellis (2007, p. 25) endeavour to leave my community 'better off at the end of the research than they were at the beginning'. Ellis declares that ethical questions are raised throughout, but the work itself is an ethical practice where I strive to make a difference to my everyday world with students. The support and guidance of the community of inquiry and supervisors is critical to this process.

Sparkes (2002) recommends 'fictionalising' details in the narrative, without losing the essence of the primary aim of the work based on self-development rather than writing the story of others. Using poetry, altering details protects the rights of individuals. I have encountered hundreds of students over the timeframe; amendment of detail is possible without losing the authenticity of the work. Being open to questioning the ethical considerations within the inquiry is a constant awareness of the responsibilities towards others whose lives are mentioned.

There have been occasions where I struggled about including some reflections in the narrative. Some of these reflections while valuable have been excluded as the risk of causing upset to others overriding benefits of inclusion. These reflections while not included have implicitly helped towards my transformation.

However, throughout the construction of the narrative I am aware that my approach is individual. Choices were made at a particular time in a particular context. I acknowledge, St. Pierre's (2011, p.623) view that analysis is 'speculative possibilities that exceed our present grasp, but nevertheless may be our future'. Becoming student kind is constant and ethereal, incomplete, blurred by my subjectivities, influenced by my past outlined in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*.

## **Summary**

This chapter shows the methodological structure, influences and approaches to constructing a reflexive narrative through Johns (2010) six dialogical movements, relevant for my day to day practice. It sets the background to offering a personal representation of an unfolding journey towards realising my vision as a nurse educator at this point in time. I show how I constructed a coherent and ethically mindful authentic narrative.

In concluding, this chapter I remind the reader that the reflections that form the narrative are presented in the original format with minimal editing. Each reflection varies in shape, length, structure, depth and breadth. They are the way they are in an endeavour to be authentic and share my story with integrity. An ethereal concept such as being and becoming as transformation presents a challenge in trying to capture real life as lived rather than a sterile version of the thoughts, tensions, dilemmas and conflict that I experienced along the way.

Chapter 3, *Narrative* presents the narrative composed of nineteen reflections, the data of my practice as a nurse educator, foregrounding Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*, where the focus turns to examining key insights integrated with literature revealing deeper meaning and learning.

Stories are personal, subjective and become a narrative when intertwined into a coherent whole illuminating a journey of insight and understanding. Thus



reflection is always incomplete evolving as we try to understand ourselves in the context of our relationship to the real world of practice.

‘To see myself, to set the darkness echoing’  
Seamus Heaney<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Heaney, S. (1966) *Personal Helicon in Death of a Naturalist* London: Faber and Faber

## Chapter 3 Narrative

*Stories are living things and then real life begins when they start to live in you*  
(Okri 1997, p. 43).

### Introduction

This chapter presents nineteen reflections, forming the narrative data of the inquiry. These are drawn from 26 reflections that were composed, shared and were the foundation stone for dialogue with guides and members of our reflective community. The reflections were written between 2007 and 2013. Three reflections are included in the appendices (Appendices 2, 4, 5). These reflections illustrate writing approaches rather than illuminating new insights

To reiterate the reflections are presented as originally written in chronological order. Earlier, I identified that that some are long, meandering, with little or no structure or consistent format. Such complexity mirrors the messiness of life that is the essence of an approach that is practice based. To this end, there is no attempt to give structure or themes to the data. A reminder that the inquiry is underpinned by 6 dialogical movements, whereby, the intention within this approach is to hold the narrative as a coherent whole. In responding to the complexity within this challenge and assisting the reader to navigate the chapter I begin with a list of reflections and their corresponding dates as they appear:

<i>Tabhair dom do Lámh</i>	Reflection 1, August 2007
<i>Holding the space</i>	Reflection 2, September 2007
<i>Emails that we (d)read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to...</i>	Reflection 3, November 2007
<i>Vulnerable students and academia</i>	Reflection 4, January 2008
<i>Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust</i>	Reflection 5, April 2008
<i>Rigor mortis</i>	Reflection 6, January 2009
<i>Spring of [Un]planned Pregnancy</i>	Reflection 7 March 2009
<i>Honour thy mother</i>	Reflection 8, November 2009
<i>She should leave she is a disgrace</i>	Reflection 9, December 2009
<i>Finding my voice</i>	Reflection 10, April 2010
<i>The tide turns towards transformation</i>	Reflection 11, September 2010
<i>Echoing Voices</i>	Reflection 12, January 2011
<i>Money matters, Erica's story,</i>	Reflection 13, January 2011
<i>Come to the edge</i>	Reflection 14, May 2011
<i>Swallows set for home</i>	Reflection 15, July 2011
<i>Holly</i>	Reflection 16, December 2011
<i>Back to earth</i>	Reflection 17, June 2012
<i>A Helix</i>	Reflection 18, September 2012
<i>A week in the life [exploring being and becoming]</i>	Reflection 19, April 2013

## **Tabhair dom do Lámh**

Reflection 1, August 2007

Eileen<sup>72</sup> a person with Alzheimer's disease and a simple encounter through touch.

My role as a nurse teacher involves visiting student nurses<sup>73</sup> during clinical placement. On one occasion, walking down a corridor on the way to meet students, I glimpse Eileen whom I recognise from a previous visit. Eileen is physically mobile with diminished memory, personality changes, restlessness and hearing loss.

On a previous visit to an acute medical ward, I discussed caring for people with Alzheimer's disease with students. We explored communication strategies that might be helpful. Students spoke with Eileen's husband gathering information about Eileen's life, her family, which might be helpful in caring for her. We learnt that Irish was the language of Eileen's childhood.

I stop in the corridor, walking towards Eileen. I notice that she is sitting in bed staring up at the ceiling, pulling the bedclothes quietly, repetitively looking for something. Her hands move as though playing a piano.

I sit down, saying I am Margaret, from the University and I work with students and that we have met before. I try to recall a detail that might assure Eileen that while I might seem like a stranger to her, I am not completely unknown.

I say hello, how is your daughter, a monosyllable reply.

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<sup>72</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>73</sup> Term nurse/ midwife used interchangeably to enhance protection of individuals.

A long silence, Eileen looks at me with a vacant and sad expression. Eileen does not appear to hear, eyes appear dark and soulless. Eileen's hands keep moving and moving across the blanket. Her hands clean and nails perfect. Yet, her hands seem frail almost skeletal and undernourished, skin paper thin.

I remembered the importance of Irish to Eileen and whisper in faltering recall of an Irish greeting

Dia dhuit, conas atá tú? Tá an lá go breá [God with you, how are you, it is a good day].

Stillness, a silence.

I feel an overwhelming sense of sadness. I need to connect with this woman and bring some comfort in her restless searching. I lean towards Eileen, saying in a louder voice

*Tabhair dom do lámh*

[Give me your hand, also the title of an old hymn].

Gently, holding Eileen's hand, mumblings continue, incoherent but occasionally I believe that I hear some words in Irish. I am aware that I can be overheard. I continue talking with Eileen speaking in poor Irish, lightly holding her hand, looking into her eyes. Hands become still, she stops speaking. I become silent. Eileen's voice is silent. Rather than I holding her hand she appears to grasp my hand.

Then Eileen smiles. Lighting up her face, eyes become alive, the vacant expression fades. A moment, extending over a great period of time.

An initial framework to guide my reflection on this experience is broadly based on Johns (2006) Model of Structured Reflection.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Paying attention to feelings*

Initially, I felt that the personal touch and silence was a simple experience. I felt an over whelming sense of sadness and compassion. Eileen is so quiet and undemanding. I wonder what is Eileen thinking. She seems to have lost the most personal human aspect of herself.

This was a valuable experience for me as a person, requiring thought about its significance for practice. While I felt positive feelings, being there with Eileen I was concerned that Eileen might benefit from the use of touch to convey compassion and care.

I am aware now, that I had become self-conscious, of being overheard. My embarrassment quickly gave way to an acute feeling of needing to be there at a special moment, an opportunity not to be lost.

Afterwards, I felt angry with myself. Embarrassed at being overheard, feelings that interfered with a therapeutic intervention between me and Eileen. On my way home I experienced a personal concern - what if anyone within my family has to face coping with Alzheimer's disease.

#### *What was I trying to achieve*

This experience was spontaneous. Something drew me towards Eileen, rather than waiting for students in the busy corridor. I noticed Eileen's hand movements. Thinking that I could help, I entered the room.

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<sup>74</sup> MSR model of structured reflection has undergone many revisions see Chapter 2

I believe that I was trying to reach out to Eileen and connect with her. I was aware that 'being' with a patient may be helpful. Additionally I was concerned that the use of touch in people with dementia may be seen as constraining or restraining. I am also very aware of my visitor status and do not have the details to provide care or to make decisions. I was not going to be caring for her through the shift. I thought my greeting, appropriate. I realise that I wanted to alleviate that I sensed was her discomfort.

I now know that this was my discomfort.

### *Influencing factors*

I have knowledge and understanding of the condition and the principles of nursing from bio-psychosocial perspectives and facilitate learning in relation to Alzheimer's with pre-registration students.

I felt that I had the confidence to concentrate on my interaction with Eileen. I experienced a moment of connection with Eileen. There was personal growth for me. I think Eileen responded. I don't think that I invaded her space – given the body language she displayed.

It was a teachable moment, I recognise, students need support in making sense of such experiences. I miss these opportunities to support students when consumed by the busy world of teaching.

The experience highlighted the importance of interpersonal skills, that a simple act of touch is extremely complex with a myriad of dimensions. While many nurses have expertise in working with confused patients this is possibly an area for further practice development.

I am a realist, aware that putting theory into practice is easier said than done. Yet, the reality of the busy practice world may mean that opportunities are not taken to further enhance person centred care. I don't mean to infer that staff don't care for patients holistically in a highly pressured environment. I wonder about the appropriateness of practice of managing care for people with dementia in the acute hospital environment.

I had time to be with Eileen, without competing demands of ward priorities. It brings me to the fundamental question - if I was a staff nurse on duty would I have had the privilege of this moment or would the organisational systems have subsumed me?

### *Theoretical framing*

In looking at the literature a reminder from Meehan (1998) writing

the nurturance of human life , the therapeutic use of self and the specialised use of hands have long been recognised as central characteristics of nursing practice(p. 117).

Touch has received attention in the literature with broad agreement surrounding two dimensions that of task orientated and caring touch. Fredriksson's (1999) analyses touch as communication, as a form of relating, a process that aims to lead to a connection between the nurse and patient. An element within this approach is the idea of connection and the opposite end of the continuum a feeling of disconnection. Gleeson and Timmons (2004) support the use of touch as interaction, suggesting a possibility that the older person in an institutional environment may be deprived of touch. Edwards (1998) when interviewing patients found that it was important to be sensitive to patient needs and that there was a reciprocal process when using touch. However, professional socialisation may contribute to the possibility of nurses distancing themselves from patients.



More specifically Meehan (1998) examines the use of therapeutic touch as a therapy in which the therapists' hands are held near the patient's body but not in physical contact. Therapeutic touch aims to facilitate healing, building communication with people suffering from dementia. A small scale research study by Doherty *et al.* (2006) found insufficient evidence to establish the value of therapeutic touch in the older adult setting. Conversely, a Cochrane review led by Viggo Hansen *et al.* (2007) concluded that current evidence is favourable in the use of massage and touch to complement other therapies for the management of people with dementia. They recommended further research in the positivist traditions of randomised control trials.

#### *Ethical Action*

The intention in this interaction was to be with Eileen to support and offer some compassion. Edvardsson *et al.* (2003) argue that giving touch to people with dementia requires consideration as it may be difficult to gain permission. Sensitivity and respectfulness towards the individual may prevent any sense of violation of the person especially when we differentiate between protective touch and caring touch. The need for me to check verbally, observe and be aware of Eileen's body language was fundamental during this interaction. When Eileen grasped my hand it seemed to convey a sense of intimacy that indicted the appropriateness of holding her hand. My intention, to convey a sense of positive energy, while touch was one of simple hand holding. On revisiting the experience, I believe that my intention was to offer compassion.

#### *Previous experiences*

I have experience in nursing people with dementia appreciating that care may be challenged when patients are restless. The use of touch as an intervention could be explored for incorporation into Eileen's care on a daily basis. I did not get a chance to return to Eileen. I did not have a follow up. Knowledge gained from

this experience needs to move forward, seeking opportunities to discuss the use of touch in practice.

### *Looking forward*

I would use the opportunity to discuss the experience with students allocated to care for Eileen. Perhaps the insight gained from writing and sharing the story will become the basis for dialogue in educating students from a theoretical basis about the discussion.

Finally, the momentary experience has highlighted for me the richness and the reality of experience and opportunities for learning for students and teachers alike in the clinical area.

## **Holding the space**

Reflection 2, September 2007

We organise PRT <sup>75</sup> for pre-registration students. Until this year the allocation of rooms has been scheduled within the department and has changed to centralised scheduling.

Usually we are allocated a seminar room, where the early more sun dapples. Chairs can be arranged in a circle, we have access to music for relaxation, often part of sessions. We are undisturbed with minimal noise from outside. I find this room creates an ambience fostering learning, encouraging sharing of reflective experiences. Our group used this room for the last day, unfortunately things changed for the second and again for the third day.

Space throughout the new building is a problem, tensions surrounding ownership and competing needs with numerous power relations. The university seeks to schedule and maximise room occupancy and usage. PRT is outside normal arrangements. I describe the design of our allocated dreary room; predominately grey with low light, originally large, an irregular shape, feels like a left over, opaque glass on two walls. The third wall faces outside, passers-by can see activities within the room. There is the sound of water running through pipes, intermittently from laboratories overhead.

At our last session students found the room hard to locate complaining of the coldness and dreariness. I explained that we were trying to repossess the preferred room.

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<sup>75</sup> Protected Reflective Time (PRT) Students have joint status as students and as HSE employees. Appendix 1 details annual reports and student feedback

We start at 9. I am running a little behind for the session, traffic heavy. The clock ticks, aware of the room problem. I am irritated. A colleague stops to ask me a question, as I walk down the corridor, wanting to be polite and available, [inside thinking, really have not got time]. I have PRT, can we catch up later? I offer to set up a meeting, sensing an unsatisfactory, possible tension for later.

Time ticks, now I am late. Walking down the long corridor I am bothered, less than calm and definitely not composed, aware that I feel that the room is wrong. I need to focus my energies, to be positive, in a mind frame to support students in sharing experiences from practice. I feel slightly apprehensive and less than positive towards the session. Sometimes it is challenging supporting students during PRT.

A student begins -We are here in this horrible room again

Three of the students fold their arms, no eye contact, adding to my unease and disgruntlement. I sigh, taking a long breath, aware that rather than me focussing on where I am, I really need to listen. There's little point in me outlining the plan or putting it in to action until we create a learning atmosphere.

MG:<sup>76</sup> what can we do to make the room a little better?

A student replies – let's fix the chairs the way we had them the last day.

As we do that. We settle.

MG: how are things? Students describe the busy ward environment, difficulties in being released from the ward to come to PRT days.

A student says 'I feel guilty sometimes leaving the busy ward'.

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<sup>76</sup> MG: self

I listen, to the challenges of practice. In my heart I worry that students will be slow to share their experiences. I use an icebreaker. I remind students of the ground rules of our group. I invite students to share diary entries. The backpacks are on the floor, no sign of a diary...

A long silence

MG: Are you in the mood? It is hard to share. I know what is like. I don't ask you to do anything that I don't do myself. I volunteer to bring one of my entries after coffee.

Fumbling in back packs, diaries come out one by one, our session begins. What follows is a poignant sharing of stories. I thought that we would have nothing. The stories vividly portray a stressful practice world. Students are supporting, empathising with each other.

Taking a back seat, I offer prompts and encourage use of literature.

At the end

MG: What did you learn from today?

Positive comments come from the students.

MG: I was disappointed about the room. Frustrated that I was running late, feeling that we would have a bad day. I feel privileged that everyone shared very valuable experiences. I feel we created a space together.....

*What was I trying to achieve*

I was trying to create a positive energy, fostering a reflective learning environment, showing students though they may have less contact with the University, we continue to value their contributions as learners.

### *Influencing factors*

I am influenced by my experience of facilitating guided group reflective practice and my knowledge of facilitating group activities. I am aware of the benefits in my community of learning at Bedford.

### *Ethical Action*

In a new purpose building funded from government health budget, the question of effective use of resources is raised. It could be said that a room is a room but, I need to strive to access and advocate for the best possible facilities for students demonstrating that we support and respect them.

I found a space checklist<sup>77</sup> on the built environment. Vosko (1991) argues that while many teachers work in less than perfect environments, but can still do much to prepare and enhance an adequate space for the learning experience. Spaces can be more hospitable when we are more thoughtful in dealing with each other. There are many way of holding a space to encourage people to reflect.

### *Previous experiences*

I have taken my facilitating skills of group activities somewhat for granted. As teachers we need to take cognisance of the reminder by Brown and Atkins (1998) that effective small group teaching is much more challenging than is realised. I was aware of the benefits of the preferred room, unable to articulate the reasoning and rationale for my dissatisfaction with the dreary room. Hogan (2003) highlights the importance of selecting the right venue for group work but acknowledges the real difficulty in obtaining a space with ambience. The use of light and colour may 'uplift the spirit as dowdy work environments may lead to people becoming lethargic' (Hogan 2003, p. 101). The architecture is beyond my control but space is appropriate for discussion.

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<sup>77</sup> Analysis of space attributes

### *Looking forward*

I have brought the allocation of the seminar room for PRT up at several fora, recommending 'ring fencing' of the seminar room for our sessions. Again Hogan recommends that facilitators need to move outside ones 'own comfort zone' (p. 96) and be aware of the aesthetics surrounding a room. I now realise that metaphorical space is critical. I could have lost the opportunities through poor self-preparation. Hogan (2003) advises the benefit of arriving early - setting out seating so that when participants arrive there is a calming mood. I now pay attention refraining from turning on the PC, checking emails before a session, or engaging in mini meetings before PRT. Instead, I pay attention, to my well-being. I am guided by Miller (2005) in taking responsibility for nurturing myself, so that I can nurture the self-development of students during reflective activities.

## **Emails that we (d)read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to...**

Reflection 3, November 2007

Friday morning an influx of emails. Some need thought, some simple, news and events. I want to go to the library, my 'to do list' is lengthy.

The phone rings. I can't hear the person at the other end of the line. The voice sounds muffled, quivering and distant. I don't recognise the voice. I can't hear the person. My right hand on the mouse scrolls down the screen, deleting invitations to lunch time concerts. I am not listening one eye on the screen. I hear a deep heavy breath.

MG: pardon

It's Mandy a post registration student [completing her final year project (FYP) <sup>78</sup>. I am her supervisor].

Mandy: I am sorry for cancelling the meeting, for not being in touch. I was going to email you but it is so hard.

MG: it is hard trying to do everything

Muffled sounds continue

Mandy: I have problems

MG: Sorry to hear that.

And despite my dismay utter: Is there anything, I can help with?

Mandy's voice is unclear, faint, I can't hear the next few words.... then the word 'husband'.

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<sup>78</sup> Final Year Project, 10,000 words, double credit weighting, results contributing to the level of the final award.



MG: Oh your husband, to my consternation, my chagrin. What happened you seem upset?

Mandy [barely audible voice] He's [husband] in prison.

I have asked an inquisitive 'nosy' question, grates on my ears.

MG: You must be very upset, must be very hard you don't have to explain anything to me.

Mandy starts to give me details....

MG: you don't need to tell me anything, you sound very anxious. Have you talked to anyone about this?

Mandy: no one knows. I lied to my parents saying he had gone home for a while.

MG: what can I do to help? [in my heart, what will I do here?]

Mandy: what am I going to do about my FYP?

MG: we can help with that. What would you like me to do?

I listen giving several 'mmm'

Mandy: could I get an extension? It's hard, to work and everything. I am not sleeping.

MG: If you like I can talk to the course leader [knowing she is around], telling her that you are looking for an extension. I explain the process. I won't divulge anything merely say that you are distressed.

Mandy: that would be great.

MG: I think that you are distressed; would you like to come in a talk about it?

Mandy: I will be alright.

MG: perhaps it would be good to talk to someone about this [mentioning counselling services]. You need to get in touch with student services regarding the 'I grade' application process.<sup>79</sup>

MG: The people in counselling are excellent in supporting students.

I arrange to communicate with the course leader, telling her that Mandy is applying for an 'I grade'.

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<sup>79</sup> Process whereby consideration is given to distressed, ill or bereaved students

MG: Mandy you need support and it may be valuable to talk about this - it must be very stressful.

A long silence.....

Mandy: I'll be alright, I'll be ok.

I speak to the course leader.

As arranged I get back to Mandy relaying support from the course leader. I mention the availability of the 'really good people' at student services and remind her to read the student handbook.

Again

MG: Would you like to come and talk? I hope that things work out for you.

Mandy: it's awful, my husband is now away [remand facility] I am going to see the solicitor for more information about bail. It's hard to get days off, trying to get to see him. [a mix up over a letter] and he should be released on bail.

MG: Mandy you need to look after yourself, so you can support your husband.

Mandy: I will be ok.

MG: Mandy we can talk about this next semester. Whatever works for you, take care of yourself.

We agreed that it is up to Mandy to make contact next semester.

### *Influencing factors*

I am aware of the need to balance the personal space of the student, not to intrude on personal lives, offer unwanted advice. On the other hand as supervisor I need to be careful with my emotional energy, seeking help when a situation is beyond my skill.

I did not wish to close communication with Mandy. It is her choice whether an 'I grade' is sought. Previous students with problems have benefited from support through student counsellors. I hope that I was not too pushy in encouraging

access to the services. I am concerned about the possibility that the student might feel labelled about the suggestion that counselling might be needed. Dyrbye *et al.* (2005) suggests that personal life events are a source of stress for students and that such stress may impact on academic performance. I underestimated the importance of listening, allowing Mandy a chance to consider alternatives.

#### *What was I trying to achieve*

I aimed to listen, to offer support, and show respect to Mandy over the telephone. I was aware of my boundaries, fearful. I heard the distress in her voice. Out of my depth, my suggestion to offer referral was premature, self-protective rather than guided by Mandy's choices. But referral is the only way to seek the 'I grade'. I try to remember the advice we receive in dealing with distressed students that the counselling services offer. I tried to offer support, but too quickly, referring Mandy.

Over the summer I worked with Mandy. All went well until Mandy cancelled a meeting. Time slipped past. There were some clues.

Email communication is encouraged for students giving us a paper trail from an administrative point of view. I wonder how it served Mandy's needs. Is our approach protective of ourselves, defensive for us, or student centred? It raises the question how does this help students? I am glad that I was at the phone.

And I wonder how Mandy is now ....

#### *Ethical Action*

I worry about Mandy; the FYP is not the issue. With hindsight, I regret not mentioning the confidentiality of the counselling service and check their web site. I am reminded of the critical importance of ethics in my research. I have written this in a vague superficial way in my application outline. Ethical

mindfulness is underpinned by Ghaye's (2007) approach which describes 'ethical relationships based upon respect for the 'Other' (p.158).

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sensitivity, towards individuals, organisations and 'respect for boundaries' will be maintained throughout the study (Manias and Street 2001, p. 235).

#### *How am I maintaining ethical sensitivity?*

I share my experiences in a safe environment within our reflective community. These thoughts have been lurking at the back of my mind but how staring me in the face. How am I protecting the anonymity of students throughout the research? I realise that as time passes, it will be more difficult to identify students. I give these dimensions more attention in demonstrating ethical mindfulness.

#### *Looking forward*

We have had several discussions at departmental level regarding student ownership of the work and facilitating adult learners in the supervision process. Our FYP guidelines emphasise student responsibility regarding extensions and submission deadlines.

My first thought was - will I email Mandy again?

I compose my-self and do nothing.

I appreciate that students can fail to meet deadlines. Behind the apparent lack of courtesy or a perception that these students are not really interested, there may be valid reasons as to why they are falling behind and seem less than committed. There are very few 'shurkers'.

Reflecting on this experience, I review my role as supervisor and advisor to students. I don't need to know about difficulties, nor is it appropriate. I choose instead to increase my sensitivity towards students. I need to consider how I handle student distress, aware of my boundaries, my own self-care, of my need

to fix things. I am reminded that communication is more about how we listen, than what we say. Perhaps, how we respond when people call on us to hear what we they have to say.

As I conclude writing up this experience, another student who has postponed several meetings cancels again. Reading the work of Charlotte Joko Beck (1997)<sup>80</sup> find a quote: 'From the withered tree a flower blooms'.

For me this quote seems apt, illustrating my role with students who appear distressed. I underestimate listening as a valuable tool. Nor do I appreciate that students can manage their distress, growing through their struggles.

What is significant for me is the importance of not trying to fix things.

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<sup>80</sup> Recommended by our reflective community.

## **Vulnerable students and academia**

Reflection 4 January 2008

At a department meeting under any other business an issue was raised regarding the BSc Nursing students FYP. Concern has been raised that students are not required to pass the module and can graduate with a fail provided their overall results compensate. Sometime ago it was agreed that this should be changed to a stipulation that students must pass the module. It is suggested that this change will assist in meeting the academic rigour of the programme.

At our meeting a colleague raises the question again and there seems to be general agreement that this proposal be implemented. I have said little at these meetings. Following a lengthy silence, I pipe up, 'students who were struggling with the FYP are encountering other difficulties associated with the final year in both practice and theory'.

It is proposed that we take a decision, taking a show of hands. I think that the topic needs more time and furthermore not everyone is present. The topic is not on the agenda. I believe further discussion is warranted prior to programme modification.

Somehow, it seems bureaucratic to hide behind meeting processes. If such an important point is raised under AOB, it warrants a full discussion at the next meeting. After some comments it was decided that any suggestions be forwarded to the module leader.

After the session I am frustrated. It all happened so quickly. These feelings of frustration are coupled with a heightened sense that I might have seemed confrontational. I did not feel prepared enough to work through my thoughts.

Why do I now feel so differently from the previous discussions? What influences my actions?

At our last reflective community session,<sup>81</sup> we discussed the influences grid and it now seems critical for me to broadly consider the use of the influences grid (Johns 2002), in making sense of experiences.<sup>82</sup>

The BSc Nursing is an honours programme. The outcome in relation to research, requires students to develop knowledge, attitude, and skills to critically review research literature and apply to practice. This outcome meets the programme syllabus standards on content related to research (An Bord Altranais 2005).<sup>83</sup> Included in the specification is a caveat whereby any particular topic 'must not be given a particular weighting within the programme'. The fundamental questions for me:

Does a research proposal or a literature review meet programme requirements?

Is it essential students pass the module?

Does this place a higher rating on the FYP module and thereby reducing other modules for example competencies which are graded as pass/ fail to a lesser plane?

I am not sure. In my view we are preparing students to be practitioners that are research aware rather than researchers.

*Conforming to 'normal practices /habit'. The weight of tradition*

The current position within our department conforms to the normal practice in other departments and colleges within the university. However, other nursing departments stipulate that students undertake a literature review rather than a

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<sup>81</sup> December 2007

<sup>82</sup> There are so many elements within the grid and I have zoned in on a few but plan to expand the experience further beyond what is presented

<sup>83</sup> Standards for Pre –Registration Education Programme

research proposal. This is a shift from the traditional expectation within academia that students at first degree level produce a research dissertation. Parkin and Bullock (2005) suggest that research at BSc level leads to an abundance of small scale studies which may have a minimal influence on practice. They stress the importance of nurses attaining fundamental knowledge and understanding in critical appraisal techniques, which will assist in practice development. The idea that 4<sup>th</sup> year<sup>84</sup> students will assist in reducing implementation barriers might be naïve. Such a view is supported by the assertion of Rafferty *et al.* (2003) that investment needs to be focussed on the generation of research leaders at doctoral level capable of attracting research funding to conduct research which will impact on practice. This is far removed from expectations within the FYP. Some students thrive on independent study, achieving excellence showing potential to undertake research at post graduate level.

There seems to be a shifting emphasis within a professional registration programme from knowledge and skills for practice to a drive for research abilities. While both are possible, are both essential? Grbich (1998) draws attention to the socialisation process whereby academic staff move from a setting where the *raison d'être* is dominated by teaching to a research culture. Teaching was to the forefront of nursing education in Ireland. The move from a hospital based programme to a third level integration<sup>85</sup> where research is a priority is a big change. Could the micro cultural context of the department be influenced by Fox's (1992) assertion that faculty are employed to teach yet, rewarded for research? Could this drive to push the research agenda influence my thinking in this situation? This shift raises tensions for me, in a young department. I am aware of my limited research skills and the need to address these deficits. But are students victims in this scenario? Are students' pawns in a

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<sup>84</sup>36 weeks internship students with joint status as employees and students

<sup>85</sup>2002



game? This has led me to consider why my view has changed and is now less definite.

*Knowledge to act in specific ways*

As a course leader, I have access to information regarding students. I am involved in reviewing action reports and attend student status committee meetings. Here decisions are taken related to progression, guided by the handbook of academic administration. Students have an opportunity to appear and put forward their cases. It is seen as a quality mechanism in the college. All faculty have information related to their modules but are unaware of the bigger picture. In response to this deficit,<sup>86</sup> an internal exam board open to faculty communicates student results.

*Emotional entanglement*

Afterwards, a colleague says that I always advocate for vulnerable students. I am fearful that there is a possibility that I could be labelled paternalistic. This is something that I need to work on and examine what I mean by support for vulnerable students. This is significant in exploring and maintaining programme standards in relation to meeting programme outcomes for research.

*Limited skills/discomfort/ Confidence to act in a new way*

A few years ago, I would not have had the courage to speak at such a meeting. I felt my research knowledge and skills were limited. It was uncomfortable and yet it seems very simple to raise this issue. I wonder was it a 'storm in teacup' or is the significance more to do with the tangible nature of the shift in my understanding of the environment within the department?

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<sup>86</sup> Since June 2007

### *Anxious about conflict*

Originally I was part of a 'group think' that it would be easier to supervise students when they know that there is a requirement that a minimum of grade C3 is necessary to pass the FYP. I did not see the change in standard as adding to the stress of students. I failed to appreciate the impact of preparing the FYP while students are working 39 hour weeks during the internship. We need to discuss the FYP as a stressor in a creative way, given the significant impact on student performance at a time of vulnerability. There is less opportunity for communication as the department grows and work becomes more complex. Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) caution that individuals and group expectations can sometimes be in conflict. The corridors, cafe and committee rooms can become a battle ground where different groups, whisper with different values vying for influence and domination.

### *Looking forward*

I have discussed the issue with a senior academic with the possibility of creating a forum to explore fully these aspects and perhaps resulting solutions and restructuring may happen. I am concerned that the expectations around the FYP could become a battle. I need to clarify my values. Writing about this issue for me will hopefully assist me in gaining further insight. Discussion within the department around programme goals is needed. I sense that my views and values are at odds with department values. This reflects the tension across approaches to teaching and learning.

I give further consideration to the following:

Values within the programme - adult learning, support and critical thinking – fit for purpose?

Academic programme standards.

The next cohort of students are moving from a 52 week rostered year to a 36 week internship – less time to undertake the FYP, so timely to review the current assessment

Knowledge and skills that are learned within the current FYP process

Research proposal v literature review and outline proposal

Consideration of vulnerable students who may be in good standing within the programme

Impact of a requirement of level of pass on student commitment to the supervision process during the FYP

My confusion feels like tangled nerve endings which have now become hypersensitive to stimulus and light. I travel in a maelstrom which is demanding, never indulgent, seeking a way, a passage which is life giving and affirming. I am eager to experience the light as that of the winter solstice at the Neolithic passage grave at Newgrange Co. Louth.

A discussion at our last reflective community session<sup>87</sup> around critical social theory and reference to Plato's cave leads me to the writings of John O'Donohue<sup>88</sup>

It takes us so long to see where we are. It takes us even longer to see who we are. This is why the greatest gift you could ever dream is a gift that you can only receive from one person. And that person is you yourself. Therefore, the most subversive invitation you could ever accept is the invitation to awaken to who you are and where you have landed.

You have come out of Plato's Cave of Images into the sunlight and the mystery of colour and imagination. When you begin to sense that your imagination is the place where you are most divine, you feel called to clean out of your mind all the worn and shabby furniture of thought. You wish to refurbish yourself with living thought so that you can begin to see.

O'Donohue's work has resonance for my inquiry. Ultimately, my quest is about me grappling in the dark to find the courage to ask questions and more questions searching for values that guide my work with students.

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<sup>87</sup> December 2007

<sup>88</sup> The Question Holds The Lantern [www.johnodonohue.com](http://www.johnodonohue.com) [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> January 2008]

## **Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust**

Reflection 5, April 2008

I continue to explore the dynamics of meetings and my interactions in college. A department meeting takes place on a Monday morning at 9.30. A room dominated by a very long oval table, seating 40 people. Department meetings follow a traditional formal approach with the usual agenda and format, minutes checked for accuracy and matters arising etc. One agenda item is a work allocation model (WAM), introduced at a previous meeting. WAM is topical within third level education. It gives weighting to teaching, administration and research activities. It is intended to be helpful in assisting allocation of work scheduling staff, ensuring fairness and transparency amongst us all.

WAM is presented at the semester end, when people are tired and busy. Not a priority for some? I refrain from the temptation to calculate my weighting, believing it would cloud my thinking and could be premature.

Debate ensues with colleagues giving differing opinions. The atmosphere seems tense and I was aware of very challenging comments that seem disrespectful to the manager's position. I sense that the process of working through the model has been given less attention than the metrics of individual allocation.

More debate is this the lifeblood of universities? Scholars, priding themselves on being uncompromising? This leads inevitably to conflict. According to West (2005), conflict is to be found in every organisation and a fundamental question is worth asking - How do we deal with conflict and how well do we deal with it? In the attempt to address the WAM proposal, there is little time to facilitate engagement in the process.

I feel a 'coldness' in the room.

The manager listens to comments noting that every department is different. A heated debate ensues. I suggest that I had found some material useful in helping me to clarify my confusions. I offer to circulate it. I feel my small sentence hang in the room.

I feel a cold eye

Paewai *et al.* (2007) comment on the complexity of the university environment, identifying the diversity of activities depending on good will and commitment of a dedicated work force in succeeding in the realisation of institution goals. Academic life is also underpinned by an idea of autonomy, but what about accountability. West (2005) simply offers the word **trust** as the currency of a university. Yet, how is trust known or shown or developed? Implementing WAM, is therefore a big ask.

I listen.

I have spent days thinking about this meeting and doing everything except writing about my experience. My feelings swirl. It seems disloyal, it seems less than collegial; it seems secretive and feels disingenuous.

I describe little of the 'debate talk'. I am less explicit and feel constrained about this writing as though there is a veil occluding my lens. I appreciate that rich description will help me with my learning from this experience. But this leads me to the heart of the matter for me at the cutting edge of this journey.

My emotions take me down corridors, public and private spaces, leading off into offices and meeting rooms. Along 'corridors of power' where power is wielded, comes to mind. I sense, being without a map falling into chaos, though I never expected study at this level to be linear. I am not naïve. I understand the journey

is not simple and what confronts me is an opportunity to deliberate over the management of my writings around members of the team, my colleagues. My concern has come face to face for me, looming a grim reality. I believe in ethical mindfulness in all our endeavours, but how will I manage the process in my work?

When writing about encounters that involve students it's easier to protect privacy. Given the passage of time, writing up narratives is simpler to anonymise as there are over 100 students in each cohort. So far this has not been a problem. It is critical to look at the aspect of my work that relates to colleagues, Words like 'spy' come to mind, the childlike phrase 'sneaky' seems apt. Am I wandering around in stealth like state of furtiveness, 'shiftiness'? How do I protect trust with colleagues, in the department and the university? I am aware of the accusation that I might bring the university into disrepute. There is conflict between my responsibilities as an employee and my journey. An ethical tension, between writing and sharing these stories?. As I try to understand the nature of my work and loyalty to an organisation.

I am lost and appreciate the importance of getting lost, experiencing angst, valuing the time, reading and reflection that will assist in focussing my lens. This goes beyond the formulae of physics towards travelling to 'know the place for the first time'.<sup>89</sup>

I listen, I ask questions. Are there adequate answers? Perhaps my thoughts are alarmist. I now move from not writing to beginning to write about a culture of trust with the organisation.

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<sup>89</sup>Eliot, T.S (1963) Little Gidding :Stanza V, *Four Quartets Collected Poems 1909-1962* [1942] London Faber and Faber Ltd p.222

The next reflective community meeting at Polhill at Bedford is soul food, challenging now comfortable amongst fellow travellers and the insight I witness is bedrock. The tension is gathering around loyalty to an institution loyalty to an organisation and loyalty to a department and fundamentally loyalty to colleagues.

Sometimes with colleagues saying I must think and reflect on this event. To a few trusted colleagues I say I must write about this experience. The journey will only be realised if I draw on the support of my colleagues.

Where are the boundaries across a practice research inquiry? (Sparkes 2008)<sup>90</sup> writes: 'fictionalise the narratives choose the genre.' A similar approach is proposed by Edna O'Brien (1995) an Irish novelist, advocating that 'the tale differs with the teller' (p. 3).<sup>91</sup> As yet the process of how to practice ethical mindfulness requires more thought.

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<sup>90</sup> Personal communication at a seminar at university

<sup>91</sup> O'Brien, E. (1995) *House of Splendid Isolation* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson

## Rigor mortis

Reflection 6, January 2009

At our last reflective community session<sup>92</sup> I presented a reflection entitled Last offices, *Ag tabhairt áire*,<sup>93</sup> exploring my experiences of facilitating a lab session on the topic of death and dying. It was suggested at that session that I consider revisiting, how I use the MSR in my work.

While Johns (2004) emphasises that the MSR aims to assist the practitioner to identify significance to insight. It is not intended to be used in a prescriptive way. I believe that I used the cues in a simplistic way. My intention in focussing on the cues in the model was an effort to bring to the surface elements within the story that may remain hidden to me.

This is a significant aspect on my reflection that requires work. I sought to objectively recall the truth using rational processes rather than dwelling within the subjective human element of the story, in an embodied way of knowing.

My reflecting on reflection is useful for me as an educator. Using the model deepens my appreciation of the reflective cues and is essential in guiding students through the reflective process. When I contemplate my effort, it was a naïve use of the MSR and the ensuing reflection for me was constrained rather than insightful. AP<sup>94</sup> commented it was 'flat'. Thus, my use of the MSR might be considered an application of a rule based novice approach as in the Benner/Dreyfus' approach to skill acquisition. It was a very useful exercise for me.

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<sup>92</sup> December 2008

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>94</sup> Dr Amanda Price supervisor



Reflecting on the reflection while confusing, frustrating and annoying<sup>95</sup> is critical to my growth.

The discovery of the commentary of Freshwater (2007) that ‘thinking feeling and believing’ are interconnected rather than separate entities is an epiphany for me.<sup>96</sup> While this is a view that I would have previously read, now it has resonance for me. My approach to using the model was an attempt to separate rather than explore the connectivity across the ways of knowing. I continue to believe that it is valuable to use the cues to seek to unfurl my thinking, to unravel, to seek essences, making sense of experiences. I feel my narratives are staccato like rather than the smooth attractiveness of ink on vellum.

I plan to be more careful with the reconstruction of stories. *Digging* by Heaney<sup>97</sup> (1990) describes the craft of penmanship but does not offer a specific how to do step by step approach.

‘Between my finger and thumb;  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.....’

I take poetic licence and I hope do not devalue the artistry of the original poet in writing *Between my finger and my thumb* (January 2009)

The pen escapes me  
Writing is fundamental  
Writing is lonesome  
Searching for meaning  
In the stillness of the night  
Staying with the story  
Discovering the art of expression  
Finding the ink  
Finding the flow  
Grasping the stylus  
Creating ethereal magic

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<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to recall the discussion at our last reflective community session, with the holiday break, detail is lost, a reminder to take better notes

<sup>96</sup> A significant word given that it is the week of the catholic feast of the epiphany.

<sup>97</sup> Heaney, S. (1990) *Digging* in *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* London: Faber and Faber

Revealing  
Finding my thumbprint.

My simple story sought a systematic approach in an attempt to gather the detail and to assist towards revealing the experience. The attempt at rigour led to a stiff and unyielding account. The challenge remains as to how to address such inadequacies and to find the time to give such deliberation to my work. I have gained insights about writing, about reflection, and about guiding reflective practice. There is shift in my approach from a technical approach to an embodied knowing.

## Spring of [Un] planned Pregnancy

Reflection 7, March 2009

It's a lifetime  
This study learning process,

Lifelong learning  
College almanacs  
Planned schedules  
Calculated time in placement

Does the rhythm of her body  
Celebrate new beginnings  
Age old cycles of fertility  
Dawning realization

Shocked bewilderment  
Joyful sounds of a strong heartbeat

Where is the individual in the system?  
Free or fettered in chains  
Chaos within timetables  
Chaos without

Banished Imbolg<sup>98</sup>  
Welcome Brigid's day<sup>99</sup>  
Laughter fills the air  
Students frolic in the campus  
Where is this new mother to be?  
Worrying about this new burden  
Sharing her innermost secret  
Where am I, where am I?

**Am I available?**  
Am I a listening presence?  
Are we available?  
Is this what education is about?  
Is this what adult learning is about?

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<sup>98</sup> Imbolg pagan word for the Eve of February

<sup>99</sup> St Brigid; Celtic mythology a pagan goddess, earth mother who became a Christian saint associated with holy wells, patroness of healing and mothers, lover of nature and the harbinger of light, welcomes the spring after the pagan winter darkness St Brigid's cross is also used as the logo by An Bord Altranais – the Irish Nursing Board

Listening as she works through her choices. Hidden fear for me bubbles to the surface. As I worried

What if?

This is a story about an experience while walking down the corridor and a conversation with a student.

I say Hello

Face, pale, grey as the unpainted concrete blocks of the wall, a student who is really keen

As we walk along the corridor she blurts

I am shocked, I am pregnant. This is not what I had planned to happen

Not this way.

Her furrowed brow, a rising lilt in her voice as caution goes.

I missed a placement and we have to plan my placement schedule for the summer.

MG: Will we find somewhere to talk?

I listen aware that the template and timetable of the programme requirements present difficulties for her in terms of managing placements.

MG: Taking care of yourself is a priority

I am all mixed up

The scan went well. What a relief!

I heard the heart rate

MG: I admire determination

We can look at possibilities about placement.

Nine weeks and counting

Will I make it to 28 weeks - never having made it that far before

MG: We can look at schedules consider options and we can talk on Monday

You have lifted a huge burden from my shoulders

She comes to me telling her story

Working it through

Giving her choice giving options

These are the stories that I know about.

Listening, being present and connecting to the real world of this student helps my resolve, my commitment to seek opportunities to keep an open dialogue with students.

I believe that I can be a human face of the institution, an interface between the system and the person. I strive to hold this tension between the system and students. Is this useful?

Are students at the centre the heart of our activities?

Having knowledge and understanding of the structures allows me to share information about rules offering choices for an individual student. My role in supporting student learning is to act as a resource and facilitator

There are contradictions between student centred facilitation of adult learning approaches and meeting programme requirements. A programme with a responsibility towards patient safety and quality of patient care creates tensions for me. An emphasis on technocratic curriculum models rather than a post technocratic<sup>100</sup> process which supports the concept of student directed learning. Is there inconsistency, a disharmony between the beliefs and the aspiration, between the espoused and the lived reality? Is the curriculum documentation a paper exercise?

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<sup>100</sup> The post technocratic model emphasizes the acquisition of professional competencies that are primarily developed through experience of and reflection on practice (Government of Ireland, Nurse Education Forum Report 2002, p.58)

How do I realise my vision and is it possible to reconcile these challenges to adult learning as a philosophy?

I thought I was supportive of students. I thought I believed in adult learning. Am I helpful? Are my learning strategies matching these beliefs? Have I a tendency to succumb to the easier option and teach rather than facilitate learning?

Are there are other students struggling?

Do our timetables support the needs of a diverse student profile trying to juggle life, work and experiencing financial hardship? There is little time for integration into college life. Studying at a large institution requires a bureaucratic process to manage timetables for equity for all 13,000 students.

Research by Lee *et al.* (1999), while over ten years old, provides some insights into the world of students. The work is relevant in highlighting potential problems in finding a work study life balance for students on nursing programmes. Lee found that students reported frustration, unfriendly, inefficient student timetables, whereby students come to college for a single session, which interfered with part time work. Lee *et al.* (1999) fail to mention that job commitments may have negative impact on college performance.

Can the organisation bend like a willow and work with them?

Is this our idea of a modern university? Have we flexible structures to support student centred approaches. Recognising students can navigate and control their own destiny? The student in this story is managing her life.

The dilemma - how do we balance recognising students as individuals, respecting their learning styles and work with the constraints of a system with over 600 students?

A discussion about beliefs and values surrounding learning and living the reality of a student centred department will come at a forthcoming day when we explore the mission of the department. A beginning.

Mooney and Nolan (2006) highlight the influence of Freire's critical social theory on education and question the challenge for an individual teacher in the limited ability to drive change in the system and reform the curriculum. An opportunity to practice empowerment. As I sit here in an eerie above on high<sup>101</sup> am I aware of the chaos of some student lives. It is a very uncomfortable isolating place to be sometimes. Now, reflection for me has become a way of exploring this isolation and my sense of disconnect between my beliefs and that of the organisation. Sometimes it is easier not to confront these issues. I sometimes feel at a dissonance with the views of colleagues.

Loss of naivety, Lei a member of our group suggests<sup>102</sup> that I can work within the institution, but there is pain in wrenching free of the comfort zone of complacency and cosiness. Fay (1987) helps clarify my thinking about the nature and culture of organisations. A possible liberating aspect of reflection? These thoughts pervade my being.

If I advocate for the concept of the student as a person, that is compatible with the concept of holistic nursing then we need to connect with them, demonstrate respect and offer support for students. Do I mirror genuine caring behaviours towards students? In turn, providing opportunities for reciprocity where

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<sup>101</sup> Third floor office overlooking green area

<sup>102</sup> Reflective community meeting January 2009

students portray caring in practice. Where are the boundaries in such relationships?

It is not about hearing tales from a confessional, neither am I their parent or therapist. I am grappling with the idea of taking care of them, rather than students taking care of themselves. Similar apprehensions were raised by Quinn (1995) when debating concerns regarding using humanistic learning theories with an expectation that the teacher takes on the role of an amateur psychotherapist.

The Being Available Template (Johns 2009) offers a framework to assist in my exploration of self as available in relationships with students. The process of connecting and weaving words to create text, craft a poem, dwelling with my thoughts that ebb and flow merging and receding helps the reflection. I have no idea of the worth of the poem or poetic conventions, whether it makes sense if it has value?

My poem gave me a sense of stillness, helpful in the turmoil of daily work. These creative processes gladdened my heart.

My view of spring from the window never ceases to nurture and guide my growth. As T.S. Eliot (1943, p. 208)<sup>103</sup> writes

The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being,  
Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,  
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination  
We had the experience but missed the meaning,  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations—not forgetting  
Something that is probably quite ineffable:

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<sup>103</sup> Eliot, T.S. (1963) *Dry Salvages* Stanza 11 *Four Quartets : Collected Poems 1909-1962* [1941] London Faber and Faber Ltd.



## Honour thy mother

Reflection 8, November 2009

A liberty Chris, thank you and apologies if I have got some of this so very wrong

**Shame:** Disgrace, Humiliation, Embarrassment, Indignity, Ignominy, Make uncomfortable, Discredit.

I felt moved, frustrated, humbled when listening to Johns' performance<sup>104</sup> at the conference. When listening, I ask what is my role as an educator in answering this call to social action?

The performance changed my way of knowing as I have struggled with the **social action** element within my reflections and this narrative is offered as one small unfurling of the sail.

Always the fear when I analyse and deconstruct an experience from a postmodern perspective, I will lose the essence of meaning,<sup>105</sup> as I search in the fog and rain.

I listened to Chris's beautifully presented narrative. What is the purpose behind the purpose of the story? I am a witness.

Am I colluding in this notion of - teach students, then they know and do  
Is this real?

How do we write?

What do we write?

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<sup>104</sup> Reflection on my mother dying: a story of crying shame presentation at 15<sup>th</sup> international Reflective Practice Conference *Comhrá* hosted at University of Limerick June 2009

<sup>105</sup> Referred to in Reflection *Spring of unplanned pregnancy*

Who reads what we write?

Feelings of disempowerment

Not all staff are like this, are they ageing battle weary troops?

A sense of helplessness

This story is different from reading the moving and positive empowerment stories of Johns work. There's no comfort in the ending.

On a sunny June day I listened to the story

How is my module<sup>106</sup> working / what difference does it make?

Is this about my enthusiasm? Is this me being battle hardened too?

Does my teaching make a difference?

One November day, we read Johns reflection on his mother's death with students<sup>107</sup> studying this module.

In Ireland we have experienced a public investigation into the treatment of older people in Nursing Homes. The harrowing account has led to the publication of the Health Service Executive HIQA (2009) standards guiding care and inspection processes for Nursing Homes. The Irish Nursing Board has responded with standards for professional guidance for those working with older people (An Bord Altranais 2009). These policy documents are expected to inform my teaching. The Taoiseach's office has asked whether such material is covered in our curriculum. I lead a module *Maternity Paediatric and Older Person Nursing* with 62, 3<sup>rd</sup> year BSc Nursing students.

I am presented with several dilemmas in facilitating learning and managing content. Learning outcomes need to be achieved and information needs to be communicated and assessments need to be undertaken. There are tensions in

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<sup>106</sup> Older person nursing

<sup>107</sup> The reading took place in small group of 12-13 students in lab sessions

balancing expectation from others and managing my expectation of self in wanting to foster dialogue. I emphasise nursing the older person. If I truly believe in person centred nursing I must strive to provide time to consider the holistic dimensions to practice.

So how do I do this? Is this sanctimonious as together we engage in reflective activities, some art, case scenarios, experiential learning as well as the traditional ever present PowerPoint presentation.

I use some 'on line work'.<sup>108</sup> Students, engaged with simulation activities.<sup>109</sup> I continue to struggle to manage theory and laboratory sessions, a juggling act. I am torn between ticking the boxes, covering content and creating space for meaningful learning.

Last year, I facilitated a session with students related to the topic death and dying and this was the focus of a reflection *Rigor Mortis*.<sup>110</sup>

Murphy *et al.* (2007) informed national standards but how is this being translated into day to day enactments of caring for older people. My teaching has got to be more than a presentation on the standards. Murphy *et al.* identified that the ethos of the care environment was critical in promoting person centred care.

At the Reflective Practice conference, I witnessed Johns' performance of the story of his mother death. It was powerful, full of pathos, subjectivity, connectedness or lack of it.

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<sup>108</sup> Moodle on line learning platform.

<sup>109</sup> Wearing older person simulation suits

<sup>110</sup> Reflection 6

I create a space for a reading of Johns' article (2009). I begin with a short introduction. Tentatively, inviting volunteers to help with reading, I offer to read the first page and students each read page by page.

I am, somewhat nervous. I feel that the narrative could be devoid of the occasion in the theatre where I originally heard and sensed the work. There is no background music, no charismatic voice of CJ, no stage presence; the poignant black and white images of Kay's (Chris's Mother) life were not available as props to aid the performance.

The November day; a grey cold clinical room, with the artificiality of florescent light, soulless industrial blinds; barely giving us a glimpse of a wintery sun. The sound of the wind swirls through the barely open window. The only colour- a multitude of student hoodies.

As we circle, listening to the reading, I hope that what I sense is happening is a positive force for good.

Earlier while preparing material I wonder:

Am I planning this session from a comfort zone of material to be covered?

Am I trying to impress- (whom)?

Was this fair? Was I sending 'innocent lambs to the slaughter'? Is that thought even in itself patronising and maternal?

This story needs to be heard

What can I do, what can we do?

What sense can I make of this?

Is this about me in an ivory tower? Could students say this would never happen?

How can I create the space for dialogue, to facilitate valuable learning?

These thoughts go around in my head up and down the corridor of power – surely these are the discussions we should have rather than the bureaucracy of administering learning.

I read, she reads, he reads, we all listen, at the end – silence, silence, I resist the urge to speak. I suggest that people dwell with what they heard, read and felt. Several minutes later I see eyes, sparkling and some distress.

We hold the space. I purposefully follow Virginia Woolf's (1928) idea

one can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one holds. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions (p. 4)<sup>111</sup>

As I look through the window in the silence of the dull winter day, a leaf slowly wafts down suspended in mid-air, colliding with all the other leaves. My thoughts, as I question where is my role as an educator?

I ask the students, what would they say to Johns and they write the comments in their reflective lab reports. This is what the students wrote in their reflective lab reports.

I was completely embarrassed to be a member of the nursing profession  
It is good to read articles [like this] every so often as it brings me back down to earth to recognise the most basic needs of the patient.

It makes me think how do I treat patients what can I do for people  
How long does it take to be gentle and help with mouth care?  
How long does it take to call a person by their name?

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<sup>111</sup> Woolf, V. (1928) *A Room of One's Own* London: Penguin Books

The smallest gesture matters we can change things we can make a **big** difference.

It was huge eye opener it is sad to see the easiest of tasks cleaning a person's mouth and brushing their hair is seen as less important as doing the stores.

It really opened my eyes how upset he was and for his mother.

It is a daunting task, a daunting issue of the workplace that we are preparing to enter.

Johns article opened my eyes to the neglect, little things a smile or the three phrases that you suggested in the text I am going to start using them now.

I felt shocked disgusted at the lack of empathy I felt sadness for the family.

The article gave me a chance to evaluate my own performance as a care assistant and student nurse while I always try to be kind and empathise with family members it is easy to become very task and routine focused it allowed me to be aware that this can happen and to be aware of recognising the possibilities is beneficial.

It is really easy to fall into the ways of services.

My experience of people dying has been so different, so positive.

I work in a nursing home and try to work hard and wonder can I change anything? But now I can. A little look can change everything.

The thoughts and feeling raised here help me be aware of how I can be a better role model for junior students.

This article is so much more than quantitative and qualitative research and evidence that we have to read.

Only one comment; I would like to hear the comments from the staff in the care home.

Such a good article I am really glad the reality to which I am aware is now being challenged.

It highlights what is going on but we are afraid to talk about.

It helped me realise the changes that I need to make in my practice while caring for the patient I need to also be aware of family needs

I don't think that I will ever forget this article and feel that every nurse should read it.

It supports the need for dramatic change in nursing homes thank you Mr Johns.

This article is one that I will keep throughout my career and read frequently I know that the day it fails to shock me or move me it may be time to assess my own level of care - a really moving piece.

I found this article very effective. As a student I vow not to let myself fall into that routine of task centred care as I know that I am one nut in the machine that can change.

After reading the article everyone became moved the story moved me, the silence in the room was so powerful. **We** are the nursing generation of change.

Can we change drastic situations like this [it] should be described and sent to all nursing homes and help re-motivate us.

This story should be sent to every hospital and nursing home nurses should have a chance to hear it to stop and think.

I felt that nursing is a powerful profession that can influence the actual lives of others and a great deal of thought is required in the littlest of tasks.

A learning experience that I will never ever ever forget.

These quickly written words – tell me that there are ‘ripples in the rock pools’<sup>112</sup>  
The blind flutters, the wind whistles in, bringing me karma. I feel we co-create a small haven, an oasis. The reading seems to influence their understanding of nursing older persons.

It was so ordinary, extraordinary, part of the rhythm of life. It seems that students are vulnerable; they come and go like the seasons. Woolf’s approach is gathering momentum for me. The lab reports were completed in a short space of time, revealing to me kindness, a commitment to nursing that may influence their understanding of nursing older persons.

*The literature related to ‘shame’.*

McFall and Johnson (2009) in a concept analysis, describe shame as an ‘inner critical voice that judges a person’s actions as wrong, inferior or worthless’.

‘Shame on you’ an age old concept from biblical times.

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<sup>112</sup>Song composed by Shaun Davey sung by Rita Connolly.



If the bible can be quoted the binary opposite can also be evoked *Honour thy Mother*<sup>113</sup> An old testament quote, rote learned in Irish schools 'Honour thy father and thy mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you'.<sup>114</sup>

So to you, Johns we say: Well done. This is an honour. I am humbled, this is what nourishes me.

*So the cry - what about the protection of older people?*

The WHO (2002) report on older people concluded that freedom from all forms of abuse and violence must be a common goal for all societies of the twenty first century. Protection begins with respect as in the words of one of the respondents: 'respect is better than food or drink'.

I need to search and find this humanity. The health service in Ireland is pressurised and is subjected to financial and political attack. Mary Harney (2009) Minister addressed the university community saying:

the greatest asset of our system is the knowledge and capacity of the people who work within it. We need to encourage, support clinicians to deliver the best possible services to patients. I have seen brilliant and dedicated leadership in the health services.

Suhonen *et al.* (2009) plead with nurse educators to consider the philosophical approaches to nurse education to focus on the person centred values of nursing rather than the organisational values and asks could both be compatible.

Are these stories read by the change agents? My thoughts shift, the wind howls. I wanted to preserve the integrity of their work. Virginia Woolf (1928, p. 127) helps me articulate my reflective writing in the following,

for the readings of these books [ in my case reflections] seem to perform a curious couching operation on the senses; one sees more intensely afterward, the world seems bared of its covering and given a intenser life.

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<sup>113</sup> *Honour thy mother*, Reflection 8.

<sup>114</sup> Exodus 20:12

Am I angry - is this tugging at my very being?

Will it bring me forth to the social action (Fay 1987) intrinsic to Johns idea of reflection?

What is it and how will it happen?

But fundamentally lest we forget to honour the story 'A learning experience that I will never ever ever forget'

Students teach me all I know.

I will keep trying to explore ways of supporting student learning, using story within the confines of the system and perhaps the ripples will become waves.

The potential of stories honours the people of the past. This story could be a binary opposite to shame.

## **She should leave she is a disgrace**

Reflection 9, December 2009

Senior nurse manager

We are not taking her back it's a disgrace

How can she be trusted?

What sort of a nurse is she?

How can she be trusted in practice?

Such dishonesty

This is against the code

She should leave

'She', a final year student nurse, alleged to have forged preceptors signatures on competency documents, having lost original documentation.

### *Evidence is collated*

Communication takes place between the health service and the university in preparing a report. The administration aspect of the process takes time checking signatures.

Information includes; preceptor not working on the date of signature,

### *Meanwhile*

The student is advised to avail of support and is receiving help through the student union. She was informed of all steps of the process and encouraged to read the university handbook dealing with any alleged breach of discipline. The process takes time in submitting report to the disciplinary committee for consideration.

'She' was silent only asking about the disciplinary hearing. Meanwhile, 'she' does not graduate. Throughout the year, further chants of disgrace. How can she be trusted? What sort of a nurse is she, how can she be trusted in practice?

### *Choices and consequences*

Possibly, no award of the BSc degree, expelled from the programme. Four years of study nothing. No opportunity to register as a nurse.

Fined

Be classified as having failed the associated modules with opportunity to repeat the clinical placement.<sup>115</sup>

My involvement began as a teacher responsible for the assessment of the module.

### *A meeting*

At an administration meeting the case is discussed. I too feel this is awful, a serious breach of trust. I could not visualise this student, her face escapes me<sup>116</sup>

I am disappointed to think that a student could be dishonest.

Still the idea of being expelled from the programme seems harsh.

I feel ill at ease.

I hear the emotional outburst. I am concerned that she is seen as guilty before the 'trial', the evidence points to serious misconduct. There is awareness, we must follow due process, otherwise she 'will get off' on a technicality. A lively discussion goes on around the table and around, back and forth, legalise, code of practice, scope of practice. A mirror image of my swinging thoughts, lots of

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<sup>115</sup> Only on successful completion of clinical placement assessment including competencies is the student eligible for presentation to the exam board and apply for registration.

<sup>116</sup> Hence the reason I have referred to her as 'she' until I connect with her.

hindsight bias? Many of the points raised are relevant. The ethical dilemmas seem black and white? Reductionism and application of cold theory separate from the context of the situation.

She broke the rules.

Expel her and the consequences- nothing after 4 years.

Are we applying reasonable standards regarding the code of practice? She is still a student. In one sense I am in a comfort zone, I don't have to make any decisions. The discussion continues around the table I could feel the tension in the room.

MG [sotto voce ] intensely aware of my thoughts swinging like a pendulum on a big grandfather clock.<sup>117</sup>

I explore my feelings. Is this simple, is this black and white? Where is my responsibility? Yet I am aware - am I complicit or colluding or in denial (not my business. Stay away). Do I need this headache?

I do not know her. I cannot visualise her. Is this a good thing, does it mean that I can consider action in a balanced way?

Separate the person from the action, is this too neat? Could this mean that I can see a clear pathway to a decision? This is hardly within the context of being human and supportive of students.

My anger dissipates. A conflict; between the right of the service and the rights of the student to a fair hearing is apparent.

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<sup>117</sup> Later Belenky *et al.* (1998) adds resonance to these thoughts on received knowledge (p. 45).

Drifting through my thoughts – If she was a person in my family I would like her to have some help.

Unless I support this student, I feel I am a charlatan, I am not empowered. I am not practising my beliefs; seeing students as individuals as people - this is not a pretty picture of me.

Am I maternal?

Am I a hypocrite, a fraud exploring and writing narratives about my interactions with students? If I am learning through reflection, am I being mindful in action?

I seize this opportunity to practice my beliefs. I am aware that there is disquiet about the current verification system. Is this a systems failure? The process of documentation management failed.

#### *Finally the hearing*

She stated that she had lost her competency book, in a panic forged signatures. She stated that she was fearful. The people representing her told her not to say anything. The legal eagle robustly defends the client. Later she said that she knew in her heart that she should have confessed.

#### *Decision*

Eventually, acknowledgement that student had missed a year.

Classified as having failed the module.

Communicate decision of disciplinary committee to service.

Student requested to write a letter of apology to services and staff nurses whose names were forged.

Given an opportunity to repeat the year.

Pay fees for the year.

Seek an opportunity to meet with senior nurse manger and be considered for a repeat clinical placement.

### *Subsequently*

Following a lengthy period of negotiations, it was agreed that she would repeat the year and would be monitored. The repeat also involved re-submission of each competency and a reflective portfolio. The student did not receive any payment when undertaking the repeat placement.

I agreed to take on the role as her advocate. I felt completely swamped, uncertain of the judgement and the possible answers in a deductive rationale form of thinking. I am learning as I suspend my judgement of this student.

### *Another meeting*

The course leader and I meet with her. I listen to her. I ask did she have ideas about what she would like to do.

The story tumbles out and her eyes fill with tears, twisting the ring on her finger round and round, the tarnished gold glimmers. She wants to do nursing, will do anything to complete the programme.

I hear other losses as the course leader asks had she spoken about this to anyone? The answer is barely audible no, no nobody.

She says that she's fighting with her parents. She can't tell them or friends what has happened. She's not in touch with students from her group.

I watch her body language, sensing her distress-her faded grey jumper blending with her pale tear sodden face, as streaks of smudged mascara leave a ghostly impression.

I wish that I had not done this

I feel so stupid.

I wish that I had told someone what happened.

Me [sotto voice], again a reflective opportunity, sensing, tangible evidence of her grief, guilt, remorse and pain, that could be described and would support her case.

I find myself, in a way, described by Belenky *et al.* (1986)

trying to watch myself more... I keep discovering things inside myself. I am seeing myself [some of the time] all the time in a different light (p. 85).

She becomes herself, a person with a name - Celine, describing carrying a burden of 'shame', a word she used repeatedly. I sense that reflection has helped me move beyond the bleakness of the situation helping me find a voice to support Celine. Filtering through my dream like thoughts from storytelling with my children:

Conscience ...the little voice inside us that tells us what is right and what is wrong.<sup>118</sup>

I suggest that it might be helpful to write about the experience of forgery and falsification. This would provide evidence to demonstrate Celine's learning. I am careful to say this is an optional approach rather than an imposition.

I ask would it be useful to demonstrate learning through reflection in a portfolio? Celine agrees. We meet several times in guiding the submission of the portfolio. The following is an excerpt:

I will never for as long as I live forget this experience I have committed a serious offence I have lied to my parents, course leader my friends all because I was ashamed of what I had done. I tried to put the blame on everyone close to me whereas in actual fact it was completely my own fault.

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<sup>118</sup> Collodi, C. (1883) *The Adventures of Pinocchio*



I lay awake night after night wondering whether or not I would be caught out, every single day for a year I worried everything felt so gloomy.

I created much worry among my family and this caused my relationship with family to deteriorate .....

However I have regained my parents trust and am so grateful to my course leader for having worked so hard for me.

I now understand and respect the university's and hospital's decision to insist I complete all competencies again.

I feel as through reflection, I have a more positive approach to nursing and have learnt from the consequences of my actions, behaving unethically will have disastrous effects.

I have learnt valuable lessons. Falsification of documents raises serious concerns as to whether or not the nurse can be trusted (Johnstone and Kavitsaki 2006).

I should have immediately told the truth about what happened.

Celine told her parents, they helped her financially to pay fees. Celine's commitment was enormous, with little money achieving competencies and has graduated.

*Why and how did it happen?*

Is there a culture of forging signatures? Recently at a parent teacher meeting we were reminded of the importance of signing notes for our sons – 'if French homework is not done' [giggles]. Letters from parents are kept on file so that signatures can be checked. Is this an innocuous habit that begins in childhood?

Is there enough attention paid to the concepts underpinning what it means to be a student nurse. Honesty and integrity are fundamental requirements of a registered nurse NMC<sup>119</sup> (2009). Being truthful is an ethical issue. Griffith and Tegenah (2009) describe truthfulness as an example of a normative rule which is drawn together in a code of practice. An Bord Altranais (2000) outlines a Code of Professional Conduct for each Nurse and Midwife based on the principles of professional conduct underpinned by a shared set of values guiding the performance and ethical conduct required by nurses. Throughout training a student nurse is expected to live up to professional standards. Guidelines for students highlight the importance of living up to the highest standards but do not specify individual attributes such as honesty or truthfulness.

Students are introduced to the Code of Practice during the first semester. Later they study law and ethics in the programme. Are these issues discussed in a way that fosters learning for novices applied to practice? How often are theories of moral development explored in practice? Which theories do we use in practice? Bjorklund (2004) reminds us of the writings of Liaschenko regarding the gaze of nursing

calling our attention to the need to make visible our moral concerns. What one can see depends on where one is standing (Bjorklund 2004, p. 119.)

I am drawn to the work of Gilligan highlighting women's construction of a moral dilemma as a conflict between an ethic of care and the responsibility of an individual to themselves and others. This is an incident that is new to me – there may be other accounts. One case does not necessarily mean that there is poor teaching of theory or poor student behaviour.

Are student fitness to practice issues hidden beneath the bureaucracy of the organisation? Semple *et al.* (2004) contend that universities seem to see fitness for award as a primary concern and fitness for practice as a lesser outcome.

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<sup>119</sup> The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), UK regulator for nursing and midwifery.

At our college, breaches are handled by the existing disciplinary committee. Questions have been raised regarding the possibility of the existing committee failing to meet the requirements of programmes that has a registration component based on a code of conduct. This committee is an internal university body without representation, in our case, from health partners. Semple *et al.* (2004) calls for clear regulations for dismissal for students who are not of good character. The NMC reported on a student midwife who forged supervising signatures and concluded that there was no doubt that the conduct was wrong and issued a sanction.

Is there evidence to support the view that she was a bad nurse? Did Celine learn? Did the experience help her be a better person, a better nurse?<sup>120</sup> Jensen and Lidell (2009) found that conscience is a driving force in the provision of quality.

I ask Celine, what have you learned?

‘I am now much more confident that I am a competent and professional nurse. My learning will hopefully benefit other students in the future and prevent them making similar mistakes.’

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<sup>120</sup> Discussed with Celine who agreed to share the story, mindful of protecting identity.

## **Finding my voice**

Reflection 10, April 2010

Frustrated,  
Angry,  
[thoughts] Bubbling up, gaining momentum.

I feel on the fringe.  
I feel like an outsider,

Powerless,  
Alienated,  
Silenced.

A faculty meeting and discussion related to the dreaded, recurring topic of student attendance. Flickering comments:

Student attendance is a problem  
Approaches to recording attendance...  
Systems to record student attendance, swipe cards

Talk centres around policy and recording systems. 'Excused absences' is the term used, based on the provision of medical certificates. An administrator in another department spends considerable time inputting attendance data. The round table appears to share a single view of the world [except mine].

*Frustrated*

The room is occupied by several senior academics nearly all at doctorate level.

More men than women, wearing suits of armour. Some lecturers contribute, some quiet, taking a back seat.

Does recording attendance motivate students?

Is there evidence to support the view that attendance affects student grades?

There appears to be a positive correlation between attendance and academic achievement (Newman-Ford *et al.* 2008). Language frequently used in the literature includes mandatory, compulsory and 'enforcing' attendance. Does mandatory attendance promote learning? How do we decide what is important and what is optional within a predetermined hierarchy.

I need to grasp an understanding of the real world of students.

Addressing attendance through mandatory recording is a measurable rational way of controlling students but....

How do you classify student absence while attending court, [a student worried about missing a lab while seeking 'a barring order']

Or that the lab finishes too late for crèche pick up?

Is this a simple problem within a complex world?

What is the problem? Thoughts come flooding into my mind.

I become aware of a comment during a previous reflective community session<sup>121</sup> where CJ drew my attention to Belenky *et al.* (1986) about knowing and finding my voice. The quote has resonance for me, the book is close by:

Separate knowing is essentially an adversarial form. If played among peers, the game is fair; but in the 'games' the women described, as being pitted against an authority, usually a professor and usually male. These were unequal contests. Teachers, being professionals are much more skilled than students at playing the game (Belenky *et al.* 1986, p. 106)

Belenky *et al.* (p. 106) continue

women students may feel intimidated by displays of brilliance she [participant] quotes that whenever I am around someone very very intelligent I am always afraid of saying something stupid and so I tend to be silent.

The quotes drench me **NOW**

Belenky *et al.* add, that the loss of voice is customary specifically when separate knowing:

is the only voice allowed and especially when that voice is just beginning to emerge

Belenky quotes from a poem *Unlearning to Not Speak* tucked away beside my computer

Phrases of men who lectured her  
Drift and rustle in piles  
Why don't you speak up

I am in a culture where traditionally power is held by males. Why don't I speak up to persons in authority? I am aware that I need to work on expressing my opinion at such venues.

I feel so alienated

Out of synch with some colleagues.

These thoughts come to the surface and why don't I speak up?

I ask - if students attend do they learn?

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<sup>121</sup> February 2010

Sitting in large lecture halls, is sometimes a passive form of listening and does it engage students in today's world. [thoughts from an earlier reflection about sitting in a lecture hall].

I mention, I have found it boring attending a lecture, yet, expecting students to listen for up to an hour and a half several times a day over the week. I blurt out, do we believe that if I speak for an hour students listen and learn?

[Pause]

I tentatively suggest - are we using teaching strategies that engage students?

There is a possibility that there could be a greater reliance on teaching large groups as a consequence, less faculty to facilitate tutorial/small groups during this recession. Will this affect student attendance and learning?

Where does the ancient idea of a university of students sitting, talking debating in class? Does it fit in the 21<sup>st</sup> world of technology, students with shortened attention spans, a different world? A colleague mentions that this is a possibility, questioning, where does mandatory attendance fit in with adult learning?

Other than that not a word to agree or disagree, just silence.

Until now I have felt loyalty to this organisation to colleagues, since joining the staff. Where do I take these ideas? How do I expose and confront or confirm my opinions. Are they assumptions? But now for me the honey moon is over. I feel frustrated. These are the real problems bubbling underneath the surface. I sense being silenced - why?

There are concerns regarding resources. Later, I find an Irish university President's blog. It states that third level institutions in Ireland are being encouraged to increase student numbers with significant reductions in resources, affecting faculty numbers recruited or retained.

So those in authority have expressed my concern. Reduced funding, larger group lectures a quick solution, an efficient way of teaching and scheduling vast numbers of students, fewer teachers.

The relationship between attendance and learning is complex. But are these the wrong questions? As a student I could have been described as 'a goody' always there. That's my style; I don't expect this from today's students. Privately I ask another question were all these academics good attendees?

The programme is underpinned by the principles of adult learning. It is expected that on completion of the programme that graduates will be competent practitioners. There is a tension between safety and adult learning. Does this mean that the programme will shift towards an emphasis on assessing skills of safety requirements at the expense of the human dimensions to care? It is essential that students can undertake hand washing and moving and handling safely. But, what about; dignity, respect, listening, altered body image, protection of children, older people and codes of professional conduct. All mentioned in early reflections.

My silence is altogether another thing and my heart plummets:

Alienation and frustration

No debate about possible strategies

Are my views ill informed, poorly articulated?

The process of how to see beyond this tension troubles me



I drive home. Frustration gnaws me. Doubt. The honey moon is over. Disappointment flows through me.

Wheatley (2006) cautions me regarding frustration as it may limit insight which may hinder the unravelling of the real problem. In turn this will lead to more fixed views about beliefs and an increased reliance on habit. Are students truly present and engaged with us because we record attendance?

Do we want people to sit in front of us because they must and revert to the traditional school of nursing training approach? Is this encouraging child-like behaviour? In primary and secondary school in Ireland a daily roll call is a practice for five year olds up with the response 'Anseo/as lathair.'<sup>122</sup> Our local secondary school uses swipe cards to generate attendance records. Parents receive a web text if there is absence...

My writing seem like an opinionated 'rant' yet these ideas toss around my head. They trouble me I awake in the early hours of the morning.

My head spins.

Am I losing the plot?

Am I separate from my beliefs and what are they?

Am I numb?

These thoughts come and go like a wave, ebbing and flowing a tide coming in and out forwards and backward, keeping me awake, over the weekend. Frustrated, longing for clarity I read Okri (1997) suggesting sleep should be disturbed so that we can consider our direction. I listen to myself in the quiet of the night.

I am lost and need to confront my confusion and frustration, confront the notion of fitting in with this academic culture or redefining my path in silence. Okri

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<sup>122</sup>Irish for present/absent

(1997, p. 9) expresses this silence as 'energising'. I am not so sure. I struggle to read and understand Fay's (1987) work on critical social theory. Perhaps greater understanding will offer me insight around ideas of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation. Moving from the darkness of self-estrangement and frustration towards enlightenment seems to be the path.

The move from enlightenment towards emancipation and motivating self into revolutionary activity in which the oppressors are over thrown is an alarming thought. It seems out of my comfort zone of being loyal and avoiding conflict. I require the practical force that knowledge from critical theory will help me in a quiet approach where I don a *velvet glove*.

Johns (2009) suggests that bringing about transformation demands four fundamental elements; intelligence, curiosity, reflectiveness and wilfulness. Wheatley (2006) also uses the word curiosity and the need to discover 'your own questions' (p. ix) and see if personal experience confirms or disconfirms new science.

I now consider, that colleagues and the 'men in suits' are people too, who are perhaps numbed in the system. It dawns on me that the attendance debate is organised around a mathematical approach. Figures recording student attendance are presented in mean and mode - a reductionism format, distanced from the individuality of students.

Perhaps, we all do not get opportunities to hear stories of the real lives of students. A data driven rather than a data informed approach (Davies and Brighouse 2010).<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Data driven suggests that we respond to short term numerical results and concentrate efforts in this area.

I reconsider, rethinking questions, an element within change as presented by Wheatley (2006).

### *Stepping stones*

The university encourages and rewards people supportive of students, rewards innovation in teaching strategies. But does the system support these ideals? Again a strain between loyalty to the university and my beliefs challenge me to be active rather than to adopt a passive acceptance role.

Understanding from these reflections has given me further questions. What do I do with this knowledge? There are contradictions between the ideal and the reality and this is critical in dwelling with my process towards achieving empowerment.

How do I manage this sense of academic dissonance between my beliefs and values? How do I move from the frustration whereby, I am numbed and could become soulless? I believe that there is value in aligning myself with people who are like minded. Dialogue provides opportunities to challenge my thinking across several fronts. I sense I am beginning my quest. For the moment, this is the start to my 'velvet glove revolution.'

### *Step*

I am aware of the idea of a possible 'atlas complex' and being careful not to take the world on my shoulders, to choose my battles. This is rock on which I could slip. Self-care is essential in preparing and giving me sustenance towards my renewal in living my vision. We can continue to grow and develop as long as we are passionate (Jarvis 2009, p. 192).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Reminds me of quote on a teapot used at our reflective community – 'you need laughter and sunshine to grow' as we sat around a table drinking tea.

### *Step*

Talking with colleagues is less isolating, helpful in examining how we can accommodate safety and student centred learning approaches. I found that they had similar ideas to mine. But the question remains - so what action do we take now? We need more dialogue.

### *Step*

I share stories in the classroom and there is evidence from feedback that students are engaging with the process. I have used *Tabhair dom do lámh*<sup>125</sup>, *Honour thy mother*.<sup>126</sup> Brookfield (1995) leads me to explore my work with students and what is *meaningful learning* opportunities away from large lecture theatres to consider 'camp fire' discussions (Johns, 2009)

I have started to use the Critical Incident Questionnaires (CIQs) devised by Brookfield (1995) to get feedback on tutorials. Students write that they find value around the idea of sitting together talking about the topic. This feedback process from Brookfield's work is useful to check how I am engaging with students.

### *Step*

I have jointly facilitated a session on bereavement<sup>127</sup> for parents in the neonatal period. Feedback informs me that it was a valuable interactive learning session through the use of story.

### *Step*

I am a member of a university group '*Let's talk pedagogy*', exploring teaching. We share readings across a broad university community. My first meeting explored teaching metaphors<sup>128</sup> and discussion around these issues. This helped

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<sup>125</sup>Reflection 1

<sup>126</sup>Reflection 8

<sup>127</sup>Not included

<sup>128</sup>Butterfly effect

clarify my beliefs about a metaphor for learning. I plan to use this activity with my reflective practice group.

### *Conclusion*

I shift from confusion and frustration to a passion that is a driving force that moves my vision to action finding my own voice in the darkness. I ask many questions I don't have answers but this is the beginning. I appreciate that writing is part of my day, guidance part of my transformation. Awareness of reflection in a more deliberate way is helpful. Donning a *velvet glove* will help me become free. Okri (1997) advises that there is no such thing as 'powerless people' they are only those who have not seen and have not used their power.

Reading Belenky helps me appreciate that it is ok to move back and forth, swept by the tide and committed to developing my beliefs and values. Okri (1997, p. 123) offers me some further light on the art of storytelling:

The true storyteller suffers the chaos and the madness, the nightmare-resolves it all, sees clearly and guides your surely through the fragmentation and the shifting world.

## The tide turns towards transformation

Reflection 11, September 2010

[This reflection builds on *She should leave she is a disgrace*<sup>129]</sup>

The wise man said  
A serious offence  
I feel hot

Bright summer sun  
Disciplinary action  
I feel frozen

A person destroyed  
A career in shreds  
Recommendation: exit looming

Remorse for her actions  
Report submitted, awaiting the outcome  
I feel the burden of her pain

Later a swim at full tide  
In the company of family  
Atlantic waves caress me  
An autumn plan materialises (August, Ventry 2010)

I write this poem while walking and swimming on Ventry Beach. The Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill draws inspiration from these parts. I have met her with her family walking here. Frawley (2005) in a series of essays with the poet writes that for Ní Dhomhnaill

Irish is a language of relationship and belonging, the language of self, the language in which it becomes most possible to communicate essentials of the mind and body's experience (Frawley, 2005, p. 3).

Ní Dhomhnaill's idea of language speaks to me and the replacement of the word language with 'reflection' applies to my experiences of reflection, as a visible sign of embodiment. Furthermore, Ní Dhomhnaill, writes that her poetry is based in

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<sup>129</sup> Reflection 9.

dinnsheanchas,<sup>130</sup> a topography of place, a starting point for inspiration in a place that is close to her family roots in West Kerry. It has resonance for me; 'my beach' is a place close to the poet's heart.

On many occasions I have walked at spring and autumn equinox, at years end and beginning, always drawing sustenance from this beach and the unfathomable waters. Stones from the beach, find their way to my pocket, windowsills, and now photographs from Ventry illustrate my work.

Swimming at high tide, in late August, thoughts bubble up about the lack of evidence to support my professional transformation. The natural elements of sound and sea, free me to move toward the light away from darkness. I realised that this was a significant aspect that I need to pay attention to. The thoughts for the poem came quickly. The poem also helps with my worry to be mindful of the primacy of the protection of individuals involved. My challenge, in managing the paradox between supporting an individual student, instigating a disciplinary action and conflict of interest becomes clearer. It is my belief that I have offered support to this distressed student, who is full of remorse, while compiling my report to the authorities.

For now, I wish to move to explore the process of addressing the development of improved systems and structures to prevent this happening again. Currently the documentation is signed off at completion of the four year programme. There is balance to be found between student independence and the management of risk and responsibilities - another contradiction. The record is held by the student

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<sup>130</sup>The modern Irish word *dinnseanchas* means "topography", recounting the origins of place-names and traditions concerning events and characters associates with the places in question, a source for the study of Irish Mythology [Wikipedia 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010].

and while empowering has led to some simple though potentially serious problems related to:

- Loss of record logs

- Problems with verification

- Tracking student progress

For this student the consequence may lead to a delay or failure of eligibility to complete the programme.

Questions;

- What are the monitoring processes?

- Are they rigorous?

- Do they stand up to review?

- Are they fair to students?

- Do they satisfy registration authorities?

My questions relate to my unease in relation to how I see a student struggling in the midst of disciplinary procedures. Was this a situation waiting to happen? In hindsight, I have been uneasy about the documentation processes surrounding this documentation. I wanted to bring my concerns forward to consideration of alternative approaches. I poorly articulated my concerns about this record in earlier and discussions. I felt an alarmist, especially given existing the arrangements had worked for years without a hitch.

There is awareness for me to move from a weak and personalised 'I told you so' approach, as all knowing, overzealous, towards an approach that would encourage greater opportunities to improve structures. Previously the climate was not right in going to the battle, now 'the velvet glove', mentioned earlier in *Finding my voice*.<sup>131</sup> Is everything appreciating that people need space to

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<sup>131</sup> Reflection 10



consider possibilities in a dialogical way. This time I carefully plan my campaign. I individually dialogue with people concerned and share principles within the dilemma that I am faced, mindful of the rights of the student to protection. So creating a forum to consider change is now critical, emphasising the process rather than the outcome. I present the discussion as a quality improvement initiative. I have chosen to steer clear of and exclude specific details of the initial experience, the subject of the poem, instead focussing on the process of bringing about change. At the same time, identifying that colleagues need information and cannot be expected to be 'mind readers' regarding the background to my concerns. So I share some broad aspects.

Yet, somehow the poetry helps in fictionalising the narrative – gives me freedom from this emotional entanglement trying to protect everyone. Awareness has dawned that an acknowledgement that the documentation warrants review and improvement, adds support for the individual student plea. I believe that if there is evidence of a need to improve robustness of systems, it might lessen her penalty. In essence this is an opportunity for me to orchestrate the balance between responsibilities for the organisation, my professional responsibility and the expression of humankind towards an individual student. I can demonstrate that I have learned from the experience and now taking action revising procedures

I begin to see that I can manage conflicting tensions. I can work with this student, my colleagues and the authorities and move through paralysis, anxiety and a sense of burden, shifting towards engaging in purposeful activity. The aim is to resolve these contradictions of student rights, discipline and programme standards. I aim to work towards achieving a collaborative agreement, in dialogue with my colleagues. Now I have commitment to consider change to the structures and the details are being worked through. The plan involves more monitoring, verification, submission and documentation storage all linked to

programme progression. A significant development during this experience has been the ease with which I communicated with the authorities the 'men in suits' and completed the report.

The poetry helped order my thoughts, feelings, responsibilities and the task of report writing. This created a medium to challenge my energies forward in a mindful rather than stressful state.

It dawns, that this reflection is the first explicit evidence of how reflective writing, clarifies my thoughts and feelings, leading me to take assertive action. Brookfield (1995) offers insight to help me in this process. I began reading his book while in West Kerry. Finding a gem of wisdom, Brookfield (1995) writes about the tendency for critically reflective teachers to become marginalised. I strive to be careful in the representation of colleagues. They are the backbone, supporting my work so it is vital that I work in a respectful trusting manner, a fundamental step in my journey. Brookfield (1995, p. 235) cautions

in a hostile culture, critically reflective teachers can be labelled as subversive trouble makers, whose *raison d'être* seems to be to make life as difficult and uncomfortable as possible for those around them. Their raising challenging questions can lose them friends, harm their careers, and turn them into institutional pariahs'....

Continuing Brookfield writes of

cultural suicide happens when people who make public their questioning of taken for granted assumptions, and expectations, find themselves excluded from the culture that has defined and sustained them up to that point (p. 235).

I heed Brookfield, planning the timing and process creating a climate rather than reacting to my sense of urgency to get moving. Foremost in my thoughts is the process of how to bring about meaningful change hinted at in recent reflections. It is now significant for me in guiding the next phase of my work. I am aware that the process of bringing about change requires 'velvet gloves'. This reflection will go in some small way, towards offering evidence to support this process.

I have chosen to illustrate the *why* of the story through poetry, concentrating on the process at bringing about a response to a systems failure relating to a sensitive and important issue. The development of guidelines to support this outcome is a positive step. Renewed in expressing self, informed by evidence from a few minutes in what is but a distant memory of an eventide in Ventry, a focus, beginning this semester.

## Echoing Voices

Reflection 12, January 2011

December a watery sun streams through the window  
Pervading my being  
In the corridor  
***She is a problem***  
Reverberates through my heavy heart  
Knowing  
Student in difficulty  
Stressed  
***She won't make it***  
My silence  
***She's too sensitive***  
My whisper  
Personal life for her  
It's hard  
Solo mum  
Far from home  
Footsteps echo away in the grey corridors of power  
A step too far  
I feel cold  
I feel alone  
Voice of silence  
Christmas feathered snow falls lightly  
Frozen branches laden down  
Concern for her and *the other*  
In the crisp and clear air  
Haunting  
Silence  
Empty spaces  
Echoing footsteps crunch in the snow  
***She has challenges***  
***She deserves a chance***  
My heart lightens  
Words I have whispered to the open air  
Listening to the echoing footsteps of years  
Voice shared  
**Halleluiah** (December 2010)

The few words, spoken by *the other* flow towards me, wounding me. I choose not to challenge the comments, knowing that the *other* is undergoing a personal crisis. Instead create a moment to dwell with silence resounding towards the *other*. I value the opinion of the *other*, feeling this is an opportunity to allow words to float across the space, aiming to give time for consideration rather than a defence of the student.

Suddenly the possibility of turning towards a 'show not tell' approach within narrative ripples through my brain. Relevant, as I read material on narrative style and structure. Is it a story about what is said, what is not said, suggestions implicit rather than the actual.

I know that this particular student Mary finds childcare hard to organise as she is now a solo Mum, miles from family support. Mary has a problem managing crèche opening times, around shift work during placement. Part of student life, taking a lot of organisation. There is a balance between supporting a student at a personal level and the professional practice programme demands.

The system encourages students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. What real supports are available once the students begin their studies? Previously, I have tried to sort things for students, taking a maternal view. I was kind to students rather than engaging in an adult to adult relationship. I have been bewildered trying to make sense of the struggle, living my beliefs. This is tentatively framed around the idea of being student kind. I listen and then I listen some more to the other my colleague. I then speak my few words about Mary:

**She has challenges**

**She deserves a chance**

Speaking softly, the view from the window calms me. Being student kind requires being present as the moment unfolds, an element that I have been watching for. I now realise that I am beginning to manage to hold these tensions between being alone and isolated,<sup>132</sup> with a longing to belong yet wanting to be true to self. There are ways to listen, to hold and express a view.

At New Year's eve in west Kerry, I find O'Donohue's (2000, p. xv ) text, helping me express the 'trying out' of my own voice and the possibility of the 'echo returning faithfully' across the vastness of the task I face. Somehow, moving from previous experiences of negative emotion, frustration, a sense of being alone, to a sense of harmony is appearing. It seems

when your true heart speaks, the echo will return to assure you that every moment of your presence happens in the shelter of an invisible circle (O'Donohue 2000, p. xxii).<sup>133</sup>

Previously I have felt as though my heart had 'plummeted'.<sup>134</sup> How does this experience show that I can be a radical, though subtle force leading me across stepping stones towards my emancipation? As Heaney (1996) in *Personal Helicon* writes 'to see myself to set the darkness echoing.'

This line offers a positive and useful self-management skill rather than becoming frustrated and caught up in negative emotions. This rings true for me. What is obvious to another, may now only offer light for me a giant leap across stepping stones of my journey towards my growth as the lived reality of a reflective practitioner.

I challenge that my verse is based around reflection, guidance, dialogue, and engagement with the literature, grasping the beginnings of a hermeneutic horizon. I am now preparing the evidence that my work is informed by words,

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<sup>132</sup>Cautious of Brookfield's (1995) ideas about being marginalised which I thought about in *Tide turns towards transformation*.

<sup>133</sup>Greek mythology, Echo, a nymph who only used her voice in repetition of another.

<sup>134</sup>From *Personal Helicon* (Heaney 1966)

with which I grapple, namely epistemology and ontological understandings. The transfer report<sup>135</sup> aims to show that my work is robust and will have a criticality that stands up to scholarly review. The process of doing this is lengthy, cumbersome, painfully slow, demanding serious study over the next months. It scares me somewhat this unuttered fear that I am an ‘impostor’, unable to prepare, present and offer a rigorous defence that the work is eligible for transfer to registration for Doctor of Philosophy. A similar fear is described by Joyce (2006) emphasising the importance of earning a PhD as a strategy for creating a more credible voice. The rationale behind this argument is based on the belief that it is only when the academy affirms the work that people will value and listen to what the person with a doctorate has to say. What’s more, this step requires a ‘coming out’ an announcement of these intentions to self, colleagues, department and organisation. This is a shift from the secrecy of a ‘cloak and dagger’ world to openness. While this is necessary and reasonable as I apply for some special leave to support the writing up process. I attend a workshop aimed at helping research students overcome obstacles in writing productivity.<sup>136</sup> It has helped me to realise that the time for procrastination is over and as CJ says ‘go for it’.

At the end of October at my last session at Bedford, further dialogue took place around the idea of voice in my work. This verse marks for me a crescendo in my journey my coming to know. An ordinary moment for me, depicts a leap along the road. Since this occasion several moments have happened whereby I am beginning to hear words that I have twittered, resounding back again towards me, gathering in intensity seen in another reflection<sup>137</sup> in this chapter. I am beginning to notice an ontological<sup>138</sup> shift in my thinking as I choose the moment

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<sup>135</sup> RS4 Transfer seminar

<sup>136</sup> Kearns, H. ‘Turbo charging your writing Getting your thesis/ research finished quicker 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>137</sup> *Money matters, Erica’s story*, Reflection 13 ( a work in progress )

<sup>138</sup> Ontological: the study of the nature of being, existence and reality concerned with what it means to exist in a specific reality (Kincheloe 2006).

and suggest an idea with others and much later it echoes back to me with resonance. I write

Moving through and across  
The voice of students,  
The voice of children,  
The voice of nurses  
The voice of carers  
The voice of educators  
The voice of the other  
My voice moves to echo back another voice.

These echoing words came quickly. It gives opportunity to further consider of the 'voice' element as a possible and/ or confirmation as an interweaving metaphor to unify and give coherence to my narrative exploring transformation in being and becoming a nurse educator. The significance of the domains of voice and the process of how my insights move through my personal support for students, seizing the moment and opportunities for listening in the interaction of dialogue warrant examination. I felt that I was listened to and attempted to see and connect with the other as again Belenky *et al.* (1986) expresses this well as 'seeing the other not in their own terms but in the other's terms' (p. 113).

Again, Belenky *et al.* (1986) words

listening to others no longer diminishes women's capacity to hear their own voices. The capacity for speaking with and listening to others while simultaneously speaking with and listening to the self is an achievement that allows a conversation to open between constructivists and the world (p. 145)<sup>139</sup>

Does this provide enough explanation for the use and application of the metaphor of voice? The words are eloquent as they speak to me, but how do I challenge them,<sup>140</sup> is my understanding true to the authors and do they offer adequate explanation of the how of listening and hearing.

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<sup>139</sup> According to Belenky conversation as constructivists describe discourse, and exploration talking and listening questions and argument speculation and sharing. p144

<sup>140</sup> or more correctly 'problematise' them



Writing by Bohm<sup>141</sup> (2004, p. 7) adds another dimension seeing dialogue

as a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. It is something new which may not have been the starting point. It is something creative and this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together.

My reading of Bohm and his understanding of dialogue enriches my thoughts, an interesting argument regarding the idea of confronting conflict or defending a position or a student. I saw that rather than tell the *other*, instead I choose to provide opportunities for space (for me and the *other*) to consider possibilities and arrive at an understanding, embracing and seeing conflict for what it is, an opportunity for true dialogue 'where if anyone wins everyone wins' (p. 7). Perhaps there are more possibilities, guided by hooks (2003) call to

strive to embody the value of risk, honouring the fact that we may learn and grow in circumstance where we do not feel safe' that the presence of conflict is not necessarily negative but rather its meaning is determined by how we cope with that conflict (p. 64).

My hope that I learn to take the kinds of risks that allow for fruitful dialogue. Freire (1990) too speaks to me in describing dialogue as a 'rebirth' a vital step in transformation and eventual liberation (p. 47-52), arguing that dialogue is fundamental to human life and merges both reflection and action leading towards praxis. I suspect that neither Belenky *et al.* nor Bohm would refute this view, but Freire (1990) offers me useful characteristics in simple language that merit examination. Freire's assertion that the transformation of education; from a passive, to an active act is based on dialogue as a medium for change. Freire suggests six characteristics of emancipatory dialogue (p. 37)

Love a commitment to others  
Critical faith in man, the ability to reinvent oneself  
Humility, learning acting together without arrogance  
Hope for action and change  
Critical thinking, reality as a transformative process  
Trust a bond.

My question; can I see these characteristics within my reflective dialogue with self, peers and guides? I believe that I have rediscovered several elements of self

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<sup>141</sup>Suggested reading

and have become better in self-care, now stepping with conflict, rather than become paralysed by difficulties. These characteristics seem useful in guiding me to consider my development in terms of living my beliefs and exploring the freedom to bring about change as I continue to see and use reflective learning opportunities everywhere.

I believe that this reflection offers evidence of responding in the moment, raising questions about silence as a positive strategy in harmony with listening. I sense an ability to draw upon past reflections, informed in the present and contributing to and influencing my future practice. It draws attention to the notion of steps towards empowerment as a movement through ever shifting sand across stepping stones, as though finding my footfall 'listening to the echoing footsteps of years' (Dickens, 1895)<sup>142</sup> around the bedrock of working in an organisation.

This reflection has moved away from the experience, giving me a chance to pause and consider many elements (silence, expressed and unknown) within the darkness of the well and provide me with direction for the next part of the odyssey. I am challenged by Chion (1999 p.1)<sup>143</sup> writing on voice from a cinematic view suggesting

Voice as elusive. Once you have eliminated everything that is not the voice itself- the body that house it, the words it carriers, the notes it sings, the traits by which it defines a speaking person and the timbres that color it what's left.

Again Chion argues that voice allows us to speak 'around' voice, to consider it as an object without becoming lost in the aesthetic of its inspiration or confining voice as a vehicle of language and expression (p. 1). I have been frustrated with my lack of clarity around questions from the summer school 2009 and the winter school 2010 asking:

Where is the influence of my reflections?

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<sup>142</sup> Dickens, C. (1895) *A Tale of Two Cities* Book 2 The Golden Thread Gutenberg Press[Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011].

<sup>143</sup> Suggested reading by Dr Amanda Price

What difference does it make?  
What is the purpose and direction?  
How am I bringing about transformative action?  
What changes are occurring in my practice?

So am I beginning to embody reflective processes? The dialogue continues aware that the reader and the guides will offer different perspectives. Finally, can this reflection be presented as an exemplar of the move toward action? Perhaps it is time for me to be mindful of O'Donoghue's words 'take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention'.<sup>144</sup> And consider Belenky *et al.* (1986) illuminating voice as a

unifying theme that links the story of women's ways of knowing and of the long journey they must make if they are to put the knower back into the known and claim the power of their own minds and voices (p. 19).

Yet, is silence in this reflection a paradox a positive force that then can echo? Or be considered as additional elements within Belenky's exposition of voice.

Or...Is it?

Halleluiah

### *Feedback from guides at our reflective community*

During our dialogue, a question is posed about my choice of a 'romantic' writing style and the use of the works of O'Donoghue. I now write this into my background chapter.<sup>145</sup>

Why did I not confront the person (*the other*)?

Was I an underdog? I mention that at one stage, I was. But that I always felt supported and that my background and family beliefs were Christian, there was a

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<sup>144</sup> O'Donoghue Invocation for Presence

<sup>145</sup> Chapter 1 *Setting Out*

keen sense of social justice underpinning that background. The approach was always to accept people as they are.

## **Money matters Erica's story**

Reflection 13, January 2011

### *Scene 1*

Erica writes

In this reflection I look at an experience that I have gone through as a student midwife. I had been struggling financially for a long time, trying to make enough money to pay for university fees.

From the very beginning, I knew it was going to be difficult but I was sure I could manage.

By the time I started my third year, I had no money to pay for my fees or registration. I barely had enough to pay for my rent or food and the building debt was starting to feel suffocating. It was constantly at the front of my mind.

Even though I knew I was in trouble, I was scared of telling anyone about my problems. I didn't want anyone to see me as a failure, especially my parents.

In some way, I thought that a miracle was going to happen and I would find the money to pay for everything. Denial was the only way I could deal with the pressure. If I pretended it wasn't real I could get on with my day.

As a result of my failure to pay these fees I was unable to continue on my course. The morning I found out I was inconsolable. It felt like all the worries and fears I had for the past few years had just been unleashed at once. I thought that there was no way of fixing this problem and that was the end of my future as a midwife.

I was ashamed of myself. I couldn't see past the mess I had got myself into.

Feelings of guilt and hopelessness overwhelmed me.

I made an appointment to discuss my situation with the fees office in the university. I was very upset and vulnerable and in some way I think I was looking for reassurance that I could sort everything out.

It was like being met by a brick wall. I was a number on their list, not a person in trouble. There were no negotiations to be had.

I was to pay my debts to the university and only then could return. There was no advice about where to go or who I should speak to.

I felt completely alone.

After I had been confronted about my situation I realised that hiding my problems from the people in my life wasn't going to help me in any way. I had never told anyone about it because I didn't want to place any burden on them. I knew they had their own troubles to deal with.

In reality, when I did tell them they were just worried for me and upset that they hadn't been there to support me.

If I could go back now, of course I would do things differently.

I would be more open to people helping me talk through my issues.

I had to recognize that I can't do everything for myself and the people who love and care about me are only too willing to help.

Looking at the whole experience now I am relieved that I have confronted the issue. I'm not on my own anymore and I have a lot of support. Although my financial situation isn't any different as of yet, and I have not returned to my course, at least I'm in control of the situation. I CAN fix this and I WILL continue on to become a great midwife.

## *Scene 2*

The system works for the system. Results for students are managed through an electronic database. Administration confirm that Erica a student is not in good standing with the fees office, owing money with a debt collection agency involved. There is significance for practice placement which the student had begun.

She cannot continue.

A meeting is arranged with the student which had the possibility of being stressful and perhaps emotional for me and the student. I have I believe begun to demonstrate some indicators toward handling emotional situations in a more balanced way and feel the words of Cope (2006, p. 21) around me –'heart, head and hands'.

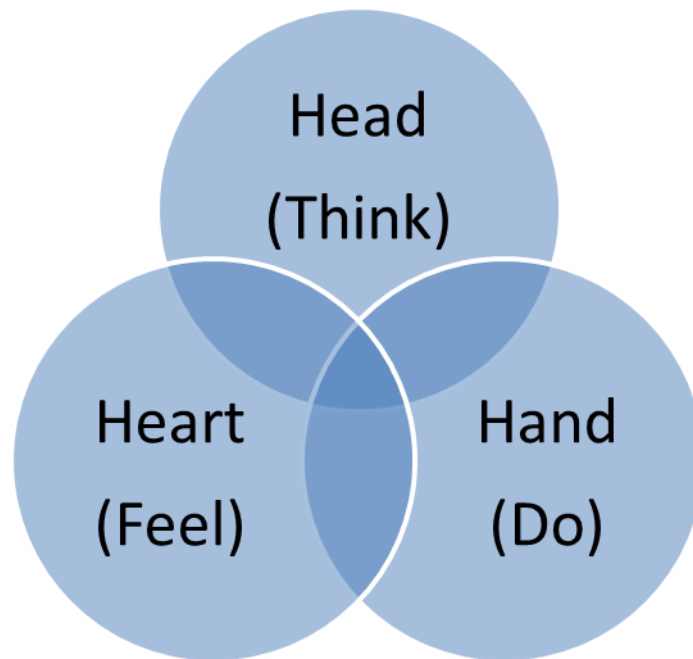


Figure3.1, Diagram, Head heart hand (Cope 2006)

I visualise the diagram, somehow this is calming enabling me to be aware of the dimensions to this situation and to strive to be present 'to press the pause button' (p. 21).

How I feel

How I think

How I behave

What do I say?

I choose my response in tune with my values which seem to be expressed in being *student kind*. I listen, recalling a line about listening being the hardest thing.<sup>146</sup> At this moment it seems inadequate, trite.

MG: I am here to listen, to listen without judgment.

Erica calmly tells the story, tears in her eyes, dignified.

MG: Erica you do not have to tell us anything or explain anything

I listen and listen and the story comes tumbling out....

<sup>146</sup> Tóibín, C. (2010) *Empty Families* London: Viking



MG: As you are not able to register, it puts your status in question – you can't be on placement...

MG: where do we go from here?

Erica: I did not realise that I should not go on placement. I am very upset. I hoped to sort this out, but the possibility of loans and grants had fallen through.

MG: Have you discussed this with anyone?

I listen to the story

Erica: it was good to face this **Now**

I listened and suggested that she go to the administrators.  
I am concerned as Erica walks over the bridge to face the administrators.

A phone call is made to inform them that Erica is coming

Erica: I have tried lots of places for loans. I kept hoping that it would work out  
Thoughts float through my head and I recall my Dad's experiences in working with a charity.

MG: Have you tried a voluntary charity?

Erica: No, but would they help?

MG: No harm in asking [name]

MG: Would you like to keep in touch?  
I could mail you to see how things were going.

I can't change the money situation, but I can listen, might be able to find out who to ring or what help is available.

Erica: I understand it is good to have met you today

### *Scene 3*

Meanwhile administration allowed access to email

Afterwards though despite my best intentions, I am angry. Frustrated at the dilemmas that Erica is going through and how the process is managed. And now come to realise that while I thought that I knew, in reality I have no idea of the hardship some students face.

I can't understand why and how it came thus far. I understand the rules, but somehow can't understand the contradictions in this student predicament. I feel let down by an organisation. Accounts must be managed, while we constantly market the importance of the student experience. I struggle to see how best to highlight the social political economic destitution Ireland faces and students are victims at the heart of this and an organisation is a victim too.

### *Scene 4*

The following week as agreed I- Email Erica how are you getting on? I invite Erica to call in to see how things are going. I wonder about boundaries. About the limitations of my role while I realise, the contradiction, I had mailed her, but now this is up to Erica.

Erica's choices – to choose to reply, to choose to come and see me if Erica feels this is helpful for her.

Erica requests a meeting.

I find myself checking in with myself. My self talk. I do not feel challenged or stressed or frustrated. I wonder what difference does listening make – it won't solve Erica's problems, it seems right.

After initial greetings

MG: I am here to listen; you do not need to give me any explanations.

Seems simple. There is grim news.

Erica: I went to the fees people. The university say that I can't return until the debt is cleared (€5500).

I tried the student union. I told my story to my parents and now I am moving back home and this would help too. I am getting a medical card. This will help me with medications. After we met I contacted a voluntary agency and I have been to see them and now in the process of reviewing my situation and seeing if they could give financial support.

Time is not on Erica's side in getting all this together to complete the programme requirements for this year. There are more negotiations.

MG: How are you?

Erica: A little better after our last meeting it brought everything out in the open. I have been in denial. I hope that it would sort itself and that something would happen. I concentrated on studying and exams.

MG: would you like to write about it?

Write Erica's story

Write a reflection

Erica: Yes, I think so

MG: Think about this. I explain the nature of my work

Erica: I remember writing a reflective piece for an assignment. Yes, I would like to tell my story

Erica: Would I use a model, how about Johns'

MG: Johns is my supervisor

MG: Erica it is your choice. We could change details to protect Erica whatever you like to do, whatever works for you.

MG: Erica's story needs to be told.

Erica: Yes it is very lonely.

I did not know what to do

Who to ask?

Where to go?

I felt nobody else had been in this situation.

I want to tell my story.

Erica goes away to write, we plan to meet the next week to discuss our stories.

### *Scene 5*

Erica's reflection arrives by email.

Later we meet.

MG: How did writing help?... How comfortable are you with it?

How do we protect your identity?

Possibilities for creativity

Erica: I am happy for my name to be used without a pseudonym.

I did not want to write an angry piece.

It was helpful to write and words came to me like shame and hopeless and despair.

MG: Could these words be included in your story.

Would you like to mention insights?

Erica: Yes, I like that idea.

We agree to meet again.

MG: Erica remember this is your space, your choices.

Later, my thoughts, I would like Erica to continue to lead herself through this struggle. Viktor Frankl (1964) offers a quote<sup>147</sup> that seems to summarise what I am trying to achieve

Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's own attitude, in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way (Frankl 1964, p. 104)

#### *Scene 6*

We meet again and Erica smiles as she walks in the door

Erica: A friend has offered me a few extra hours in a coffee shop while I am not on placement and this will help with money.

Fees office is like facing a brick wall. Speaking to people in a corridor is not very nice. Once I was brought in to the office - they get a key and come around to let you in. I am enjoying writing, it's helpful; passes the time.

MG: I wonder would you like to read what I wrote, showing my reflection

Erica: that's amazing wow

MG: no Erica your work is wow

We agree to meet again. Erica takes off with what I sense is a determination to get support.

I am aware of the balance between supporting students and leaving them to lead themselves, taking responsibility.

Another layer of dialogue.

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<sup>147</sup> Frankl wrote of being imprisoned in a concentration camp during World War 11

### *Systems*

More and more activities are available through on line systems improving efficiency with the management of student details. Students, numbers, efficient systems, but it is nevertheless impersonal.

The crux of the matter is if a student is not registered she

cannot register for modules.

cannot access on line communication and support services.

cannot have exam results collated.

Withdrawal of this right especially through non-payment denies a student engagement with the system.

### *Organisation*

I am challenged by the mission statement and the dissonance between the innovative ideas driving the system and the perceived organisational reality of this situation for this student. I wonder about the Student Union in this situation? Why are they not agitating for such student problems? Erica tells me that they can help with accommodation not with money. A report informs the faculty of increased requests for help through a hardship fund. There are rumours of debt collectors going to parents doors over accommodation deficits.

The IUA<sup>148</sup> identified concerns in supporting a more equitable system, concluding that the fairest approach to individual contributions is through a system of deferred loans and top up fees in line with a system in operation in many countries. This may not help Erica now but how and when this new approach will be enacted is a question. What about the students that don't make it – dare I challenge the system? It seems reminiscent of the French revolutionary words 'let them eat cake'. Oh my, my thoughts run away with me.

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<sup>148</sup> Irish University Association membership including registrars

Some students<sup>149</sup> are between a rock and a hard place while awaiting government policy change during the interim period.

*Between a rock and a hard place*

Erica is falling through the web of a system and where is the bridge between efficiency and individual support? I seek to give a voice to Erica, a student, I seek to move through the normal chaos of the system and mention and seek clarification of process. I do not live in Utopia and cannot cater for all people all the time. I have an understanding of the nature of the organisation. I email the chair of the group that looks at the student experience to highlight my current experience. We shall see! Through discussion the department will now have a voice on this group. The creation of opportunities for dialogue is necessary to explore approaches beyond the surveillance of money toward an approach that involves an advocacy for students. The student is the business of the organisation. The heart of my business a belief *student kind* is gathering, seeing the isolation that Erica's experiences. You will argue Erica is an adult and she makes choices.

I give witness to the slippery slide of denial. But is this enough? Do students feel that they can approach us in the corridors of power? How can we help them learn how to work within a system? Are they facing 'brick walls', learning how to talk with 'the men in suits.'

Is this where silence is part of a vulnerable disempowered for me and for Erica? What do I do? I use my knowledge to ask questions about students in difficulty to any of 'the suits' echoing back and forth within the places and with the people that I mingle in whispers ....

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<sup>149</sup> I can only speak for the students that I know about, I have no ideas of the broader numbers.

But the fundamental idea, that I can manage to work within a system that acknowledges things are the way they are and ‘the courage to change the things that I can and the wisdom to know the difference’ (*Serenity prayer*).<sup>150</sup>

Do I possess the wisdom to know the course of action to take? I am now more aware of the complexities of situations and am opening up to question ethical tensions around my assumptions and my loyalty to the organisation. I see an increased role in my search for my academic freedom to take steps towards being provocative as a way of being. There are ethical tensions between me as an employee and not bringing the organisation into disrepute and wanting to speak out. I am beginning to get a sense of this is the way things are. I am now finding ways to progress and enact my beliefs of a *student kind* presence. The idea of the university strategic plan is ‘pioneering and connected’<sup>151</sup> as espoused by the President

One of my core beliefs is that universities exist for the benefit of their students, and I am particularly pleased that this Strategic Plan stresses the provision of an experience that challenges students and inspires them to reach their full potential. We seek to educate graduates who are prepared for pioneering roles in society as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs.

I explore the tensions inherent in the contradictions of the ideal and the lived reality.

### *Reflection*

Are my reflections now more questioning and challenging of an organisational system? This insight has been through guidance in our reflective community. I feel that I begin to think more clearly without illusion - collaborating in groups - and apply Freire’s belief that empowerment should be a process of collaboration between groups. I need to consider how I go about working with like-minded people.

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<sup>150</sup> Jim, my Dad carries this well-worn quote in his wallet – from the AA 12 steps programme – while Jim has not got an alcohol problem, over the years he uses the phrase like a mantra in his decision making.

<sup>151</sup> University strategic plan 2011-2015, p. 1



I sense my watching looking for opportunities

I give voice to Erica a student

I try to be provocative

Is this enough?

It is though at last I can listen.

I find out what it means to be *student kind* when the going gets tough. Again Brookfield (1995) helps me with the idea that the dilemmas are continuous, contradictory and chaotic, while there is what Brookfield describes as 'loss of innocence' within my understanding of the complexity of life in an institution. For me I have purposefully sought to avoid possible cynicism. I process these thoughts through nurturing myself<sup>152</sup> replacing helplessness and an increasing my ability to survive. I am beginning to be more thoughtful, poised, less stressed

We become progressively attuned to the complexity of teaching, its contradictions and its chaos, particularly when we are trying to put some purposeful experimentation into our practice, these realisations often signify the beginning of wisdom (Brookfield 1995, p. 239).

For my transformation, I have learnt that behind every student number there is an individual many of whom are dealing with crises, some are resilient, some survive and some encounter the brick wall and fall through the system. While dwelling with the stories and the literature - the words force, tradition and agency - as described by Fay (1987) have sinister relevance. I am aware of a sense of awareness of the influence of critical social theory in helping me review the context of power and the influence of my values in helping me question existing standards. A process of enlightenment has occurred in raising my consciousness, a person subjected to oppression. Moving from 'false consciousness,' confronting a crisis towards 'transformative action' (Fay, 1987, pp. 31-32). I strive to work collaboratively with individuals to develop alternate ways of understanding myself and the social context of enlightenment is not

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<sup>152</sup>Through the use of nature, literary texts and creative writing on some prose poems

enough for my liberation. Critical social theory must provide a motivating resource for individuals therefore empowering them. I see a hint of students' unfulfilled opportunities as they walk back and forth over the bridge of an institution caught between the dream and the reality. I will find ways to bring down my stone walls and use the very stones to build some stepping stones creating a bridge towards being.

### *Stepping stones*

Self-care balances within the moment. I now take a deep breath, pause, aware of my tensions breathing in calmness.

Different perspectives in this story.

More than one version of the truth.

Erica's story, my story and the story of the suits and of an institution.

My understanding of my role in providing a *student kind* voice gathers momentum with the possibility of the use of the role, framing perspectives.

Is there evidence of the praxis of Belenky *et al.*'s (1996) *Ways of Knowing*: to have a voice which is tentatively moving through a process of a connective voice.

## Come to the edge

Reflection 14, May 2011

Following on from the last reflective community session, it seems important to pause to explore where I have come from, review my reflective work to date and consider the relationship between my thoughts, responses, engagement with literature and emerging insights. And as a consequence consider the ever evolving spiral which continues to inform my daily practice. Aware of the wish to move from where I was, to where I am, and will be, is guided by these insights. I take a step beyond my comfort zone and '*Come to the Edge*'.<sup>153</sup>

I chose to focus on interactions in fostering student learning, guided by Okri's simplicity that 'the fewer the tools the greater the imagination' (1997, p. 124).

For me this is about stripping back my thinking in relation to literature around my experiences. In January, I discovered bell hooks and later shared some of my thoughts and ideas about learning.<sup>154</sup> Reading bell hooks (1994) *Teaching to Transgress* challenges me with this thought provoking text

work not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students....Teaching in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately occur ...have the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote and assembly-line approach to learning (hooks 1994, p. 13).

Where does this connect with my reflective writing and meaningful learning? I have been given a new module to teach. It seems significant to address these ideas, to move towards action to continue to take a step in the shifting sands of my odyssey towards being and becoming an educator.

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<sup>153</sup> Logue, C. (1969) *Come to the Edge New Numbers* London: Jonathan Cape, pp.65-66. Inscribed on the dress worn by Irish President Mary Mc Aleese at her inaugural state banquet.

<sup>154</sup> March session

At the same time, in January, the university hosted a colloquium, one of the key speakers, an academic leader from the UK spoke about emotional intelligence and the work of Daniel Goleman (1998) as an attribute for graduates. Reading about this construct offers me further opportunities to 'push the pause button' (Cope 2006, p. 23) and think about my direction.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is described as an ability to express and monitor one's own feelings, those of others, using this information to make judgements and take action. Learning is thus seen as more than a collection of information and an understanding of abstract concepts. It is about 'discovering ourselves in relation to new ideas' (Roseik 2003).

EI has been described as a positive movement. Roseik (2003) suggests that in the debate about education there is an increasing focus on 'measurable cognitive outcomes of teaching' and less about personal and social competence. Roseik, while writing from a teacher education stance has relevance to nursing. In Ireland, there is shift towards a technical education in nursing in response to the government safety agenda. Safety is vital but does this take place at the expense of dignity and respect as part of nurse education. Freshwater and Strickley (2004) propose that both can be interdependent. Cadman and Brewer (2001) suggest that empathy is one of the hallmarks of EI. Watson (1998) sees caring practice as an occasion for learning and growth as practitioners, through communities of reflective practitioners. Horton Deutsch and Sherwood (2008) argue that reflective environments will help towards the development of an emotionally competent nurse.

Akerjordet and Severinsson (2010) in an integrated review on nursing leadership argue that EI has potential to support professionalism, self-awareness and relationship management in care provision. There are major changes coming in the wind and I believe that there is need to consider these aspects before we are

buffeting by the demands of the details of writing a curriculum. It is likely that we will be caught up the micro-management without truly addressing our mission, a foundation stone in guiding curriculum reform. I can see the possibilities of using EI attributes as part of curriculum development and as a possible fit with university strategy. The process of developing the EI of graduates could include the creation of caring reflective communities. During the colloquium I doodle, day dreaming and write on a scrap of paper, which found its way to my diary.

### **How How How**

What does this mean to me where does this fit in with my beliefs?

How had I forgotten about the concept of emotional intelligence

Could this help with the new module that I was now scheduled to teach.

### **Why not**

What about bell hooks - can EI fit in with this idea? Can I give it value in my plan for teaching the module?<sup>155</sup> I had gone to the colloquium a little curious, but if I am honest, frustrated about whether it is the best use of my time – and my need to get the new module ready. Little time, to consider the delivery of a new module on sexual health, for which I now had responsibility. How best to structure the module in line with my ideas about meaningful learning? And now there is EI. I understand that EI is represented through the being available template and where does this fit in? I notice that these ideas are coming more and more to the fore. I tune into my thoughts - observing myself expressing my thoughts where I initially felt a burden and a possible problem. I feel a disassociation, a paradox between my beliefs and the reality of my actions.

Do I have the energy to take this on and even more puzzling how could I not have the energy? Senge writes in the introduction to Bohm (2004) about the nature

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<sup>155</sup> Reflective diary January 2011

of collective thought when things are moving along and there is no obvious difficulty and we don't 'want to rock the boat'. At the same time, my insights move me forward. As Bohm (2004, p. 79) suggests

normally we don't see that our assumptions are affecting the nature of our observations. But the assumptions affect the way we see things, the way we experience them and consequently the things we want to do.

Overnight, I move with composure, dwelling with the confusion (Okri 1997) rather than be threatened by the idea that this module is problematic, moving away from negative feelings impeding my work.

I have teaching and clinical experience in sexual and reproductive health, but it had been a while and never with midwifery students. I looked at the learning outcomes all nicely fitting into Bloom's taxonomy and ECTS credit<sup>156</sup> system. Colleagues were very supportive in discussing and sharing ideas, material and content. Where could I find voice taking opportunities, heeding the call to lead myself and steer my own boat (Cope 2006). But what do I want these people to be able to think about and do? What sort of learning space do I think would be valuable and why?

In December, a chance discussion with CJ, a twist of fate when my thoughts were initially about workload, led to dialogue and a guiding challenge - in essence a simple question floated in the air - why not shift completely towards dialogue? I know that I want to do something different but why? What is the evidence guiding me?

There is something from my intuitive knowing.

What is the point of me displaying my knowledge and giving hand out after hand out to students as passive users? My rediscovery of bell hooks challenges me to have

courage to transgress boundaries [beyond the approach] that would confine each pupil to an assembly line approach to learning (hooks 2010, p. 14).

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<sup>156</sup> EU credit calculation for module , based on the Bologna agreement

For me questions about teaching;

Trying to impress with a display of knowledge

How does this help learning, whose needs are being met?

Are student's passive and empty vessels to be filled?

Is the giving of information allaying fears – that I can say, I told them this, I covered this, satisfying the organisation – in the event of a problem arising later in practice?

In the background, so many administration tasks that are central to my role at the department, clouding my vision, but my intuition allowed no acceptance of the 'status quo' position. It could be easier to stay with the old, the familiar, to teach the traditional way and perhaps when I have a handle on the module try something more adventurous next year.

Where is my guiding light? Where is my vision about meaningful learning, how can I live the dream and Johns and Freshwater (1998) encouragement to

design your future visualise where you want to be and then build the bridge from your present where you want to be (p. ix).

Backwards and forwards. A deep rooted desire to challenge myself and to seek to find space to bring this to the surface was supported by several chance happenings. The colloquium, the new module, my reflective writings, dialogue, ideas about meaningful and student centred learning, coming towards me on the incoming tide.

And something else rippled through me more questions about the balance between skilled practitioners and the philosophy of the programme. I then realised that my recent experiences in grading students' reflective assignments had influenced me. In their essays, students went to great length to explain the clinical aspects, the scientific rational elements, rather than begin with the personal, the individual woman. I felt that it would be valuable to create

opportunities to explore these beliefs to consider women centred care and consider the aesthetic experience as a valuable source of evidence in guiding practice. The ripples spread, a sense of the tide coming in too quickly. Taking a step away from the familiar, out of my comfort zone, without anxiety and worry.

### *Carpe diem.*

I spent time choosing the readings, designing the module structure and processes. I juggle with the idea of moving completely toward a single reflection, but unfortunately, these students would not be in practice during any part of our module. I choose an incremental stance, sharing readings and reflection underpinning the module. Dialogue is the backbone to the structure and process part of the assessment. I feel that this approach to the module fosters EI learning opportunities. Once again I used my adaptation of Brookfield's (1995, p. 115) C.I. Q.<sup>157</sup> as a process to see what works and does not work from a learner perspective. I appreciate that part of my work involves my self- assessment, but, when moving away from the force of tradition it is useful to consider as many elements to inform my insights.

### Student commentary is illuminating

It was [at] the last session that I realised the module is over we have learnt so much information without the pressure of the exam

At the first session, I set out my stall about dialogue, exploring ideas, readings and creating a space for considering what sort of practitioners these students could be. We begin with an icebreaker, agreeing ground rules and our understandings of engagement and participation. I had spent time drafting and redrafting the approaches and assessment criteria for students. Yet, I underestimated how much time needed to be given to bridge for students between traditional teaching approaches towards a dialogical approach. This is supported by the feedback of some students:

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<sup>157</sup> Critical Incident Questionnaire



Confused on first class about what was expected of me in participation but it came with time.

For the first few sessions I found it was hard to get into the module it was hard to get to know what you wanted from us but then I realised you don't 'want' anything in particular You don't 'want' us to think in a certain way.

I can honestly say that there never was a confusing moment the ability of our class to talk openly and freely lead to no questions or worries going unanswered.

I gave two fifteen minute content sessions, aware of hooks' (1994) suggestion to move away from an 'assembly line teaching'. The misused PowerPoint presentation disappeared. I was aware of hooks (2010, p. 160) plea that

teachers who are wedded to using the same teaching style everyday who fear any digression from the concrete lesson plan missed an opportunity for full engagement in the learning process.

Elsewhere hooks (2010, p. 19) extols the benefits of an engaged pedagogy, based on an assumption that 'we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher'.

A small band of sisters listened, talked and shared ideas sitting in an informal circle together, late on Monday and Thursday evenings till well after 6 with excellent attendance over the semester. Being in the midst of this space in the room was liberating. Aware of the demand and challenges. I find time to gather my composure, walking down those dark corridors and along the way down the stairs towards the late evening sessions.

I was never aware of this process before and I have had many teaching sessions across the timetable. In retrospect my preparations were more about content and technology: would the projectors work, the right usb, typographical errors, my notes, sequencing of power point slides, attendance records. Instead, I use the short journey to purposefully calm myself to be available for the learning process for these students. I feel that this anticipatory reflection process was critical. I realise that it is essential to be aware of the dynamics, nuances of opinion, undercurrents as much as content of the sessions. For me it is like

coming from the darkness to a clearing of mind. My view of learning opportunities for this module seem like refreshing spray from the incoming waves of the tide.

Did the aims match what actually happened? The feedback illustrates the benefit of the approach to dialogue and the shared readings whereby a student writes

When my group read the [summary] article to the class I felt good because I felt that I was able to teach the class something they don't know before.

The appreciation of the potential learning from working together in the seminars came through in the following

During the presentation I felt like I was letting all the class know what I learned from researching the topic transferring my knowledge to them

Discussing each topic was interesting and helpful but also enlightening we learnt the most in this module by listening to others

I found it hard speaking in front of the group but this was a good learning experience and helped me feel more relaxed.

I liked the way the module wasn't just lectures on topics.

I felt part of my peers, learnt a lot from them.

We got to engage [with] ourselves and reported back and I learnt far more from this.

The use of reflective diary writing was critical to the learning process. Diaries, some beautifully covered, came out of the back packs at every session. Time was given to write at each session and a round robin took place, often beginning with the cue such as - What did you learn today and what meaning has this learning for you?

We were asked about what we learned from that session this was interesting to hear about other people's opinions and what they made of the session.

How we all learnt so much I actually didn't realise how much I had learnt until today [final session].

Listening to what the girl's diary entries were about, what struck them and surprised them.

I was surprised that I had chosen my particular reflective comment as it was personal but I felt glad that I had shared it I had actually forgotten that I had written it.

We are going away with so much information that we learnt without even knowing we had learnt it that it wasn't daunting.

The way we learnt by doing different things, presentation, readings and not by loading ourselves with info just for the exam.

The impetus to change this module began with my reflection at the colloquium and the debate about emotional intelligence. I had deliberately chosen to use dialogue with students and create a space to foster the development of EI. I purposefully sought to bring the ideas of 'being with women' and family to the heart of our practice. Can there be a balance of the technical skills and respect and dignity for women as individuals? (Bohm 2004, Brookfield 2006, hooks 1994, 2010, Goleman 1998) How far did I go toward achieving this aim? Again students say it all:

I have grown as a student midwife I feel more able to deal with women centred side of things.

I know that I will never ever be judgemental to any women.

It has taught me not to judge women and to realise where they are coming from.

I now understand that as a student midwife I have a role in supporting women.

Everything we covered could be related to my midwifery care that I provide. Even taking a few minutes to ask the women how she feels and being able to support her.

This [module] has made me appreciate women's' background more and where women could be coming from after having a very difficult time getting pregnant [assisted reproductive technology] or suffering from STI's.

The thing that struck me was when it was suggested that you need to take care of yourself as a woman to provide the best care to women.

It has opened my eyes to the world there is so much happening around us, we are not even aware of. Before when I'd see a pregnant woman she was just a pregnant woman but now I am aware to keep in mind that there would be much more going on in this women's life.

I can't wait to go on the next placement and be a woman centred student midwife.

I think that this module will always shine through what I do say or act.

To be sensitive to what you cannot see straight away.

There is implicit support for demonstration of some of the attributes within EI. Was this present already or did our dialogue help uncover the possibilities? My journal entries have words like:

Yes

Empathy

‘bean cabhartha’<sup>158</sup> this is what it is all about

What potential for voice?

Why can’t it always be like this?

Did I go far enough and can I take further steps towards further change for next year. I am careful of roles and relationships between students and boundaries. While delighted to receive affirming feedback I am aware that there are many influences at play (Brookfield 1995). I realise that there is always the possibility that students attend, participate and comment because they were ‘supposed to [or should]’. Feedback was given at the last session when grading was complete. Is there evidence of an expression of elements of emotional intelligence? And as always students teach us all we know as one comment indicates

a continuation of this module in 3<sup>rd</sup> year even not as a graded module to further our knowledge.

Now the group plan to work with the students union to be involved and help run the ‘sexual health week’ next autumn. Discussions are taking place with the class and student rep and the student union.<sup>159</sup> This reflection could be said to be co-created between us as a band of sisters. Could it be a ‘transformative praxis’ as outlined by Tavakoi and Sadeghi (2011) through shared understandings, dialogue leading to further questioning which contributes to reflexivity? These ideas fit in with the recommendations of Freshwater and Strickley (2004, p. 96) that EI can be placed at the core of curricula rather than as an addendum and

while not a panacea for all the ills of nursing and nurse education we firmly believe that it [emotional intelligence] is at the heart of learning to care, both

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<sup>158</sup> old Irish word for midwife being with/ helping women

<sup>159</sup> Students realised his possibility in organising information stand and distributing leaflets.

for one's self and for others and as such deserves to be examined in more depth (Freshwater and Strickley 2004, p. 96).

For me looking inward and outwards and backwards and forwards is like the spring equinox tides coming and going, sometimes with the rush and whoosh of the tide, always with the prospects of escaping towards achieving enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation in a complicated world (Fay 1997). Thus, Christopher Logue's (1961) poem *Come to the Edge* seems appropriate

We might fall.  
Come to the edge.  
It's too high!  
Come to the edge.  
And they came,  
and we pushed,  
And they flew.

#### *Stepping stones toward insights*

Do the student comments support the influences of bell hooks (1994, 2010) and Goleman (1998) in supporting meaningful learning? Did my idea of creating a space for dialogue and reflective thinking contribute to the development of learning for students?

Further reflection on the use of the CIQ (Brookfield 1995) as a valuable way of receiving feedback is worth examining. This is timely, as recent discussions have been held about the use of on-line survey<sup>160</sup> as a quality initiative.

Giving greater attention to dialogue and the possible application of a 'circle of voices' approach to conversations, similar to our reflective group might be valuable. This is in keeping with a community of learning as described by Brookfield (1995). Next time, as I gather confidence to continue, trust my intuition, informed by self-realisation, literature, reflection, and dialogue with

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<sup>160</sup> Centre for Teaching and Learning coordinates student module evaluations

self, peers and students. We can go forward. Stopping to pause has given me the momentum to continue, to continue to question my assumptions.

A concern: is it right to open this opportunity for students while not following on and developing it ....somehow my insights guide me **yes**. These dress rehearsals - albeit in a cloak and dagger fashion - can help the performance of my voice in a curriculum review which has been announced, emerging shift to social action.

Grains of sand are building the foundations of a shift towards evoking 'my voice' in striving for a curriculum with a strong reflective theme. I can practise and use my voice and in turn support students in finding their voices.

Perhaps, now is the time where there are ways that I can walk towards achieving my vision of student kind meaningful learning?

Feedback from An Bord Altranais<sup>161</sup> acknowledges the work that we are doing on reflective practice- another step towards taking action. We can build on this as the commentary notes

evident, that significant work and progress has taken place, in relation to reflective practice. The additional work carried out on reflective practice was noted by the site team to be commended.

Stepping towards the edge; taking that leap away from trepidation - informed through a reflective spiral, with courage and conviction. I am learning to shape opportunities towards a voice for political action.

Finally, a line which offers me support to watch for the ripples in the rock pools even though the tide washes away the footsteps, the stepping stones remain and the words from Pirsig (1979, p. 413 ) from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

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<sup>161</sup> An Bord Altranais Irish nursing registration and accreditation body

So where is the quest.... They saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes.

## Swallows set for home

Reflection 15, July 2011

It is the time of year again when I grade reflective practice assignments. It is the time when I meet with students who are unsuccessful and give them feedback. A 'repeat' window, at the end of August gives opportunity for presentation to a graduating exam board in September.

The midst of summer, most people are on leave, the car park empty. I struggle with energy juggling and trying to find time to work on the search to conceptualise, find a metaphor to express my journey. Apparently, theories ought to have grab, be parsimonious, show connectivity and fit. While this approach applies to grounded theory, it is a helpful starting point for me in striving to write Chapter 4 (Giske and Artinian 2007). The language and theory elude me. A suggestion, that I leave the thoughts to emerge playfully, they will come.<sup>162</sup> According to Glaser (1998, p. 123) the writer becomes

sensitive with his learning which makes him alert to the possibility of emergence and how to formulate it conceptually.

I await, writing about my approach to writing and use of nature. I have ideas but no unifying plot. Swallows swoop and dive outside my office window. I take time to breathe in the beauty of the moment.

I am protective of my time and commitments as I arrange to meet students. On one hand, I am careful about mudding reflective practice as a process, trapped in the cloak of an academic assignment and on the other the importance of ensuring students understand what needs to be done to pass the assignment. This morning is about giving feedback. A different, approach for feedback, from last year. I now realise how I am going to be with students as each session unfolds. It has little to do with the giving of information more about

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<sup>162</sup> CJ at last reflective community session



Giving space  
Giving time  
Time to listen  
To hear in the silence  
To be present

The pleasantries over, a student, Nora says 'I have never failed anything '

MG: have you read the assignment again and what do you think?

Nora: I am not sure how to fix it.

MG: Let's look at the criteria.

No literature, a lengthy description of busy ward and investigations.

A sense of Nora as an observer.... Other people were responsible and ...

Nora wrote 'a patient said in response the question- how are you? Not too good at the moment, Nora, I know something is not right, I am frightened'

Nora continues writing 'telling him[patient] a joke and 'don't worry' as I tried to 'lift his spirits and cheer him up'

A moment missed as written in the reflection.

MG: Can I ask you about your story? I am guided by Palmer's (2007) assertion that there is

no right answer the motive behind questions such as these is to help you reflect on yourself rather than convince you to see things my way or any particular way (p. 15).

What was it like?

The story came, Nora as a student, her fears, her lack of confidence...

I let the silence come

Nora's eyes fill, remembering the story.

I glanced through the smeared 'guano' window as the swallows swoop

Nora tells of tears shed in the sluice room, this was her first experience of such an interaction with a patient.

Nora tells of listening and being with the patient

This is why I am here  
These are the stories  
I need to find space to hear them  
Find the space to share them  
To make sense of them  
We use and work through the influences grid (Johns 2010).

My frustration drills deep into my being. Where is support for students? Where is the evidence around 'breaking bad news? Why isn't it happening? Research about communication and caring and workshops, is available for years. Bringing literature to the reflection, we find an article by Tobin and Begley (2008) reporting on a phenomenological study. This research draws attention to the process of receiving bad news from a patient's view within a theme - 'knowing and yet not' (p. 31). It offers us structure. We share some ideas about the piece and the quote

...the hand landed on the lump. And I knew from the minute I felt it I knew that this was cancer... I knew, I just knew, Maise.

Another line from Tobin and Begley (2008, p. 35) adds poignancy

before reaching the point of knowing, many of the participants had to deal with having their suspected knowing dismissed, undermined or trivialised.

An old story. A new story for that patient, for Nora and for me. Earlier, writing of the struggle, where and how to 'theorise' and show evidence of my transformation in bringing about change in self and my practice. I found and printed a poem *Low Road* by Marge Piercy (1980)<sup>163</sup> and the last verse

It goes on one at a time,  
it starts when you care  
to act, it starts when you do  
it again after they said no,  
it starts when you say We  
and know who you mean, and each  
day you mean one more'.

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<sup>163</sup> Piercy, M. (1980) in *The Moon is Always Female* New York: Alfred A. Knopf

I share the poem with Nora. Our minds meet in the air across the table, an understanding presence. Echoed by Senge (2004, p. 13) presence as

deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense.

If I believe the words of Piercy's poem we can bring about change one by one. Senge (2004, p. 14) adds a more global view about presence as leading to

consciously participating in a larger field for change. When this happens the field shifts and the forces shaping a situation can move from re-creating the past to manifesting or realising an emergent future.

Practice, experience, reflection, literature, guidance in an ever evolving circle of happening. It is a subversive approach. I am still cautious that reflective practice will become a negative word associated with failure. With some relief, Nora says 'I get it now'. Nora goes to the computer lab to write the story from her heart. And for me that which was lost has been found. Was it enough? Somehow, I think yea. The swallows, nest outside my window, the messy 'guano' mars the view, but there too is beauty in practice experience, writing, reflecting, literature, theory...

Back to my reflective journey; Student kind; is about space, time, listening, silence, presence, empathy, non- judgemental. Somehow in the midst of my confusion in responding to the call by supervisors to theorise and explore student kind, I grasp some serendipity synchronicity reading that ....

swallows have always had great meaning to sailors..., return home every year, no matter where they have migrated to, further enforcing the motif of a safe return to home (Swallows, [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2011]).

The messy smudge on my window pane and the swooping, twittering of swallow speak. For some annoying sounds, dirty windows, for me clarity, in the messiness of the world and 'my gaze' (Said 1978). Later, I read the story *A Single Swallow* (Clare 2010) from Dan's library following the migratory patterns of swallows where<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Dan Graham, husband, tells me about the comings and sightings of swallows as seasons change.

The swallow weighs little more than a fountain pen, yet twice every year it makes a journey of a scale and precision unmatched by our mightiest machines. Theirs is an extraordinary existence, even by the standards of birds (Clare 2010, p. 3).

So, writing is where I will find my way and journaling always preferable to theorising. I sense Maria Fordham's words about wanting to keep writing stories. It is grounded in my reality rather than theory and constructing an argument. But is the journey moving towards land only to rest a spell and begin again. I have searched for language around compass, navigation, north, south, nothing but mist.....

Tensions, between outer and inner self. Late evening a draft comes from Nora. My heart soars. There it is. Nature in reflection and both intertwined renew re-energise, influencing student kind as a presence. Echoed in the words, 'swallows and humans have lived alongside each other throughout recorded time (Clare 2010, p.9).

### *Stepping stones*

It is so freeing to be unravelled from 'emotional entanglement' and fear of conflict

Dwelling with the stories as the plot unfolds

Writing a way of being

Possibility of using 'being available template'

From writing, connectivity will come forth (here writes an optimist)

Perhaps a collaborative voice.

Explore support for students on placement and literature on students and experiences of death and dying.

## Holly

Reflection 16, December 2011



Holly, cuileann, Ilex aquifolium

My outer self is all of a prickle  
Much to do  
All to do  
Before the winter solstice  
Stepping down<sup>165</sup>  
Handing over  
Weary  
Untrue to self  
Raising questions  
How can I see what is coming?  
Do they see it differently?  
Are my ideas valueless?  
Am I a thorn in their side?  
Am I like the Celtic myth of cuileann the crown of thorns? <sup>166</sup>  
Feeling negative  
Am I a thorn in the side?<sup>167</sup>  
Equilibrium stretched  
Too much to do  
Too little time  
Embarrassment,  
Eking frustration  
Martyrdom, negative destructive energy  
Hangs heavy on my head  
Am I taking care?  
I feel everything other than mindful  
Being student kind is hard  
Being there for students is easier  
Was I, am I, true to my values

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<sup>165</sup> Stepping down as course director

<sup>166</sup> Myth, that the holly formed the branches in Christ's crown of thorns

<sup>167</sup> A thorn in your side is someone or something that causes trouble or makes life difficult for you.

Shift toward social action seeing possibilities within the chaos of the system to promote student kind (ness) is a struggle.

Scarlet berries

Words echo back:

Maybe, we need to look at how we structure learning

Maybe, less two hour classes

We need to meet people; we need to engage in dialogue.

Winter solstice offers light.

Beginning this reflection, I did not know what to write. I feel alien. Looking back on the demands in this period of transition, looking for the 'whole' I find a book, Senge<sup>168</sup> (2004, p. 96) writes of 'presencing' as a way to surrender our need to control and, suspending our habitual thoughts taking notice. In turn this redirection fosters awareness and an awakening. From simply looking at red berry holly, some meaning comes when turning to Senge (2004, p. 159), synchronicity 'is about being open to what wants to happen'. Useful insights from Senge, relevant in terms of my pain, how I can now suspend my anxiety, appreciating the destructive nature of my emotions

when I am finding myself worrying about little stuff or whether I am a hero or a failure , I know I am listening to the wrong voices (Senge 2004, p. 141).

Ideas well known and written about in texts. Living them is an awakening, developing beyond my inner self. As Senge (2004, p. 142) asks how to find our way to becoming a servant of the whole? Quoting Lao Tzu

do you think you can take over the  
universe and improve upon it?  
The universe is sacred  
you cannot improve it  
In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.  
in the pursuit of Tao, everyday something is dropped.  
Less and less is done  
Until non-action is achieved.

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<sup>168</sup> Book close by my desk

Tao abides in non-action,  
Yet nothing is left undone.

How to find the space where no action, [where] nothing is left undone?

From the arrogance of 'I know' to the primitive winter evergreen holly as  
protection, overcoming of anger, a spiritual warrior.

Now red berries offer cheer  
Remembering prickly leaves protect the berry  
Natures form has chance and chaos  
Heralding the solstice  
Bringing me back to my roots  
I am humbled  
I am privileged to see me now thorns and all  
The visceral pain in my side has lifted  
The game continues.<sup>169</sup>

The beauty of evergreen, enduring woven into my voice interconnected, a  
student kind voice will emerge.

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<sup>169</sup> Another myth associated with the tree talks about its white wood as the white chess pieces  
and the black pieces as ebony

## Back to earth

Reflection 17, June 2012

Storytelling offers an invitation to interpret and weave patterns of meaning within a reflection. This brings my learning through guided reflection to the fore, clarifying my beliefs about realising desirable practice as a nurse educator. I consider how these insights shape interactions with students, relating understanding in an unfolding experience to show how reflecting upon and in the midst of experience informs my insights in how I choose to be with students.

I move through being kind to students to an expression of student kind, as an integral<sup>170</sup> student kind dialogue, a lived reality as a spiral encompassing my daily interactions with students. I reveal a text for dialogue bringing together a space for consideration of the personal, political and historical and social dimensions to my narrative.

Rather than anticipate an outcome of a meeting and while careful about boundaries I choose to focus on listening to a student seeing what unfolds rather than be consumed with worrying about what I need to do. I am guided by Isaacs' (1999) text *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*. Isaacs, acknowledging the influence of Bohm<sup>171</sup> in shaping his ideas, writes that 'listening, respecting, suspending and voicing are four practices that are key building blocks to dialogue' (p. 78).

Bohm (2004) proposes that identifying our underlying beliefs and assumptions and values provides a chance to consider the nature of different opinions that we hold. Thinking about thinking can bring out of the shadows, the nature of our opinions and how we interact with each other. Elinor (2005) in critiquing Bohm's

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<sup>170</sup> 'Integral' a word used by Wilber

<sup>171</sup> Quantum physicist, writer on dialogue



work suggests that the influences of Krishnamurti<sup>172</sup> on being present without judgement and described as 'choiceless awareness' discriminates Bohm's dialogue from other forms of dialogue as interaction.

I aim to be open to the possibilities. I flow with the thoughts, deliberating over the importance of moving away from seeking to fix situations, using a 'maternal/paternal approach', whereby I think that I know what is best for students. A notable shift informed through guidance and feedback from previous reflections. Formerly, my lack of confidence in handling situations with distressed students revealed across reflections would have left me anxious. Feelings clouding my thinking with what I now realise is concern about what will I do/should I do here? [in a situation] rather than for the student.

My aim therefore, is to engage in dialogue with May a 4<sup>th</sup> year student, struggling with mental health and relationship problems that resulted in time spent in refuge, impacting on her placement performance. Last year, May took leave from the programme. Now, May is back on internship, with longer and more intense placements, demanding performance at registration level.<sup>173</sup>

It all begins on a busy Monday morning, checking emails for an assignment from May before our meeting.

Nothing.

The office door opens,

May's chalky white hand grabs the door handle a glimpse of a tiny 'tangoed'<sup>174</sup> wrist.

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<sup>172</sup> Buddhist

<sup>173</sup> 36 week placement

<sup>174</sup> A colloquialism for the orange colour of fake tan

Eyes wide open, a furrowed brow.

Thirty minutes late, no apology. Oh how I hate fake tan.

I become aware that my tensions can be transmitted through voice and actions.

Moving away from frustration about punctuality, I seek to listen in a respectful way, suspending judgement. Today, is about the assignment as I heed Isaacs (1999, p. 100) advice moving from

saying what we ought to say and behaving as we ought to say and moving from exasperation to connecting with what we do with what we say.

I detach myself from the busyness of the day.

May clasps her hands tightly together.

MG: May how are you?

I become aware of the unfolding moment as my past reflections inform my present. In this way Polkinhorne (2010, p. 296) proposes that the construction of a storied description of a practice process is undertaken in a 'concrete life space'. I suspend my judgment that sometimes people being late irritates me and 'tangoed tan' is a reminder of teaching tired and unenthusiastic students following party nights. I park my frustration; focus on an awareness, that at the heart of dialogue is the ability to be truly present (Bohm 1996). I recall a previous meeting with May whereby service partners raised concerns about competency. May was distressed at that meeting and afterwards took leave. I move from listening with 'disturbance' (Isaacs 1999, p. 98) recalling the distress of that meeting, instead, creating a space.

May begins, haltingly

I am worried about work

I am confused

I don't know everything

I keep checking that I am doing things according to guidelines.

I check the app<sup>175</sup> on my phone every night

I am worried that I will do something wrong.

Her eyes glistening, unshed tears.

Memories of my distress when students cry. At an early reflective community session, CJ asked what's wrong with tears, do we need to send a person to counselling because of tears. I now choose to support students through dialogue rather than simply referring them to counselling. I am now calmer in the face of these situations. I note my concerns, striving to enter into an authentic moment with a person.

May wrings her hands.

A thought comes to mind and fades. How can people perform at work with assignments, FYP all this going on? What is our curriculum about? I have read that mental health problems were seen to have a significant impact on academic performance (Kitzrow 2003). Watkins *et al.* (2011) found that there is an increasing prevalence of mental problems with more than one in three American students reporting feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function. What can I do, should I do anything? This is significant. Previously I would have tried to address this situation in a 'maternal fix it way', scrambling to try to do something. Instead, I choose to listen with empathy. Empathic understanding is simply described by Lee (1960) in her novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird*.<sup>176</sup> The character Atticus Finch, a father helps his daughter understand the nature of people's behaviour saying

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<sup>175</sup> Application on smart phone

<sup>176</sup> One of my Moms, favourite books, hence the familiarity with the quote Lee, H. (1960) *To Kill a Mocking Bird* New York: Central Publishing

if you can learn a simple trick Scout [his daughter] you'll get along better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it (Lee 1960, p. 31).

Empathy requires an ability to develop self-awareness that according to Ketelle and Mesa (2006) demands a person to separate their own need from those of other people. It is an ability to share, understand and appreciate the feelings of another. I follow this view and centre on my interaction with May. Previously, I have been anxious about such potentially stressful encounters and fall into what Johns (2010) describes as 'becoming emotionally entangled'. Being aware of my emotions, shifting from 'self-concern' to concern for the other May. I now note the relevance of entanglement, of being unable to think clearly, a potential barrier to becoming truly present with May.

I check in with myself, holding close my beliefs around student kind.

MG: internship is a juggling act.

Again, I move through Isaacs (1999)<sup>177</sup> practice of dialogue. My previous stories describe conversations with students revealing situations of personal loss, poverty, grief.

May: everyone is busy at home.

They don't understand.

They are far away.

I split with my boyfriend and moved house.

A story of isolation grows.

May's hands twisting tissues in a tight knot. Another question comes [in sotto voice - who helps May?] and fades.

May: I love nursing.

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<sup>177</sup> Management consultant who worked with Bohm

I take another leaf from Isaacs (1999) listening, suspending judgment, respecting... I can learn from May, as I move away from the idea that I know best.  
May: I want to and I will make a great nurse [repeats].

Listening with respect is according to Isaacs about 'looking for what is highest and best in a person...' (Isaacs 1999, p. 117). I choose a moment of stillness, fluid like the ebb and flow of the tide, with constancy to my presence, my intention to give May an opportunity to work through her thoughts.

MG: I never doubt your commitment and passion about nursing.  
I listen some more, responding to the rhythm of what May is saying

May: I cannot manage assignments, competencies, shifts and I'm tired.

MG: taking care of self is part of getting through and passing competencies in becoming a nurse.  
I indicate that my aim is to support May to provide opportunities for success and learning and if she's doesn't succeed an action plan.

May: the flu is affecting my performance.

I recognise for May that there are choices, aware of effort, expense and energy that May has put into her studies with the possible loss of her dream.  
May: the GP and occupational health have raised questions about the demands of the programme on my health?

MG: what do you think of that idea?

I move away from conforming and deferring to the authority who knew best, approaches based on my nurse training background.

The ebb and flow continues.

MG how do you find the level of performance expected of a 4<sup>th</sup> year.

May: Hard and harder...

MG How do you want to go forward?

May seems more composed, skeletal hands rest still on her lap<sup>178</sup> While showing respect, I am aware of tensions in supporting a student and my role boundaries.

May: Maybe, I need to go back to the GP and the counsellor. I am finishing a competency this week.

At this moment, I am not fearful of May's safety or the safety of patients.

May: I will email everyone.

The assignment can wait. I remind May that it is her choice to get support, my intention to give control to May. Giving control and autonomy are attributes of a graduand of a programme aiming for professional registration (Fazey and Fazey 2001), fundamental to my understanding of student kind. I leave May with her responsibilities, offering a choice and that I am available if she wishes to contact me. This is noteworthy as my memory of previous occasions when I would have initiated action on behalf of a student. This choice is dependent upon May's ability to manage herself, awaiting to see how this unfolds. The following week, I learn that May is on leave without completing the competency, a continuing pattern. The complexity for this individual involves mental health services, occupational health, counselling, course director, health service partners and academic affairs. Uncertainty remains about May's struggle and future. I hold

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<sup>178</sup> This could be said to be wishful thinking on my part, but May's body language indicated some composure

these uncertainties and choices at the heart of my dialogue. Rogers' (1967, pp. 304-311) helps frame my beliefs about learning,

when the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems *to the student*, then the likelihood of significant learning is increased....[Students feel deeply appreciative] when they are simply understood – not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their own point of view, not the teacher's.

This quote informs my appreciation of empathic understanding around student kind learning. Fostering dialogue through listening, respecting and suspending while being with a student is an active representation of living my vision. Providing a student with a space to work through their concerns may help student lead themselves. This idea of personal leadership is guided by Cope's (2006, p.11) assertion to 'be who you are and what you want to be'. While this is the aim of what I do for myself, how it works for May, a student who is vulnerable at this point in time in her personal discovery is another question. I chose to give May the opportunity to show an appreciation of the requirements of being a professional. I am careful about the possibility of creating what Espeland and Shanta (2001, p. 343) refer to 'behaviours by others, perpetuates dependent behaviours'. They add that caring, supporting and assisting are co-dependent behaviours, frequently associated with women and in particular nurses. My educational background would certainly influence my actions in this regard. The traditional schools of nursing fostered a climate of co-dependency. Many reflections later I am now vigilant of this as a tendency in my work.

I choose how I respond through dialogue to a student and there are consequences in taking this approach. Where does this fit with my responsibilities and relationships with my colleagues and health service partners in acting for the best. This is the tough part of discovering an integral approach to living the values within my vision of student kind. This experience with May has helped me move through, beachcombing my experiences, and consider where I position myself betwixt and between both, is this a problem? Reading

Bohm (1996) my thinking shifts about labelling this quandary as a problem, picking up on the derivation of the word problem. The root from a Greek word meaning 'to put forward,' (Bohm 1996, p. 71.) Bohm argues that what we traditionally describe as a problem might lead to what Bohm (1996, p.73) expresses as confusion and argues that it 'might be better to say that one has been confronted by a *paradox*'. This is the reality of the messy swampy lowlands of the real world. Illustrating how my inquiry brings me back to earth.

On the one hand, there is the need to have an empathic understanding of the student and her ability to speak for herself and my avoidance of falling into a trap of paternalism. On the other hand, the importance of working within my boundaries. Where are my actions placed within utilitarianism, whereby I consider whether the needs of May are secondary to the needs of society, in this case practice and protection of patients in an organisation? Who has the right to determine this?

I acknowledge May's struggle, she needs to take responsibility for her actions, demonstrating an awareness of self-care for her health needs, part of preparing for and becoming registered. There are consequences if May is unable to demonstrate such attributes. I aim to create space and time for May to work through choices, to succeed or fail. While May has accessed support services, this has been somewhat irregular of late, a pattern that has been described by Manthorpe and Stanley (1999).<sup>179</sup> This study involving nursing and social work professionals, recommends that the approach to supporting students is individualised balancing any potential dangers and benefits. They argue for the development of transparent guidelines to help resolves these dilemmas. Manthorpe and Stanley (1999) refer to 'effective and compassionate treatment and work out guidelines for safeguard and intelligent non paternalistic supervision.' They hint at empowering a student, this can only happen through

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<sup>179</sup> Funded by Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales



open conversation. In practising student kind consideration needs to be explored within the context of an individual rather than simply creating and following guidelines to be applied across the board.

Legally, a medical doctor has the authority to determine May's fitness to be at work. Previously I would simply have deferred to this authority and now see that I can contribute to this discussion. Dwelling with my story, I notice that I move to think for myself rather than a referral to an authority. In the past, many nurse educators coming from traditional schools of nursing positions would have said a student is not suitable and she should leave. Currently there is an awareness of the rights of an individual with mental health problems within anti discriminatory and equality and disability legislation. There is an expectation of reasonable accommodation for students. May, however, has not registered a disability with the college.

Later, I pick up on my use of the word 'partner' rather than health service providers. My use of the word says it all. I value this relationship which I see as a collegial<sup>180</sup> rather than what the educationalist Fielding (1999) labels contrived or artificial collegiality. My view demands that I pay attention to how I dialogue within a partnership. Fielding, advocates for a radical collegiality within teaching, whereby 'the reciprocity and energy of dialogue supersedes the monologic exercise of power' (p. 28). They expand arguing that such an ideal 'animates a responsive and responsible professionalism appropriate to and supportive of an increasingly authentic democracy'. This radical approach has resonance for me in how we engage with practice partners, adding further support to Bohm's (2004, p. 7) assertion that dialogue is

a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. It is something new which may not have been the starting point. It is something creative and this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together.

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<sup>180</sup> Reading discussed at *Let's Talk Pedagogy* group at the university May 2012.

Regardless of how, where, and if this fits, in my write up, I appreciate that being open to the possibilities of discovery is essential. Cope (2006, p. 83) professes that having a clear view of our journey 'ensures that the choices you make today will be of value tomorrow'.

Cope continues

There are three aspects to your life: the way you behave-the part others see; the way you think- the rational part of you; the way you feel- your secret inner life that only you know. When these are separated you feel confused and anxious; when aligned, you gain a clear sense of purpose (Cope 2006, p. 83).

Again Cope

the heart, hand and head choices come together in a unified whole then any choice will be easy to make (p. 64).

Later in the same text Cope argues that in this way, I can lead myself and in the context of this story provide an empathic space and dialogue with a student to lead herself.

While I understand some of the complexity in this story, doing something about this is more difficult. This reflection has helped clarify my thinking about what student kind is not, as in the conventional construction of an argument in a thesis. Nevertheless such thinking, helps in my expression and understanding of what student kind is, whilst holding this view tentatively, open to review in dialogue with colleagues and guides. The insights that I draw from this reflection refine my understanding of what I hold as my vision. Student kind then is listening, respecting, suspending and voicing. Perhaps, even more explicitly than stated by Cayer's (2005, p. 175) analysis of Bohm's dimensions to dialogue as conversation, whereby the following are key

To talk together without agenda

To listen to each other;

Respect, empathy, care, receptivity and solicitude

To understand the experience of the other

Intentionality

Interpersonal reasoning

Reciprocity.

I share this reflection as a starting point in fulfilling the criteria for dialogue described by Bohm, Isaacs and clarified by Cayer. It is an ever evolving searching for meaning grounded in my day to day life. In listening to the story of struggle and suffering, I offer an empathic space for an individual.

I choose to care for another person, based on Watson's (2000) vision that being connected to humanness will foster my growth, and in turn offer space for students to 'mature as a distinct healing professional' (p. 223). In this way there is the possibility for a student to integrate

unity of the profession and the practitioner alike with the compassion and passion of nursing's life and work (Watson 2000, p. 223).

I have managed a paradox between being student kind offering choice, balancing professional responsibilities and safety for a student and protection of students, patients and organisations. Being student kind to a student is a first step in bringing about change, a mere ripple in the ocean. I am moving from taking a defensive approach to situations, aware that my next encounters will involve me moving from personal interactions with an individual, threaded with my professional role. These steps will inform discussions around political dimensions whereby I assert my beliefs about student kind. The college espouses the quality of the student experience and is supportive of individual disability informed by guidelines. This experience, however, highlights the fine line of consequences if a student is on placement and is unwell. Yet, if this student does not succeed in practice her hopes and dreams are dashed. I choose to offer an opening to discover and take responsibility for herself, becoming resilient and able to cope with her struggle.

These insights lead me to actively seek opportunities to become more political and strategic in exploring these issues across the institution. The college is

addressing the challenge between personal rights and professional registration demands in our programmes. I have contributed to recent discussions on this topic. I sense my integral learning through my journey of discovery and next week sees an opportunity for me to lead myself and engage in dialogue with the men in suits. A consequence of rethinking, I am informed by my insights, through further dialogue. I address the fourth practice of dialogue 'voicing' as described by Isaacs. I endeavour to live my vision within the context of the organisation that values the quality of the student experience.

## A Helix

Reflection 18, September 2012

### *Prelude*

A helix of stories, flowing, coming and going, revealing an intertwining student kind dialogue. Each story begins as separate but as my reflections continue each is linked to the other as the turmoil of coherence continues. I begin with anticipation of a meeting and the unfolding elements, drawing many of the struggles within a journey identifying a vision for practice. I ponder on being student kind as a way of dialogue, as the bedrock of trust, towards possibilities within servant leadership in the search for a voice indicating transformation. None comes before the other, neither can be enabled without the other, each is woven together along a connected continuum which is delicate, subtle, resilient intact or shattered. The reflection's afterword focuses on student kind as a dialogical voice as yet to be examined.

### *Story 1 Anticipatory thoughts before the meeting*

Preparing to go to a meeting without an agenda.<sup>181</sup> I plan to have a conversation with Health Service colleagues and in this way clarify thoughts about Anna, a fourth year internship student. Anna has extended sick leave and is struggling over a long time to meet placement requirements of the programme. I then consider the learning and insights gained towards consideration towards the future destinations. This is in keeping with Okri's inscription 'Our future is greater than our past'<sup>182</sup>

It begins with a phone call arranging the meeting between the health service and the university. Can we meet and talk about Anna?

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<sup>181</sup> to look forward to, especially with pleasure; to deal with beforehand; act so as to mitigate, nullify, or prevent Wikipedia [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012]

<sup>182</sup> Okri *Mental Fight* on the Memorial Gates Constitution Hill at Hyde Park Corner, Constitution Hill in London

First thoughts this feels right. I am going against the grain of managing meetings. Yet, going to a meeting without an agenda could be foolhardy given management texts advice regarding meetings. Many refer to the structure of an agenda as essential to organisational work. Previous experience, tells me that preparing and organising an agenda for a meeting is important. Before meeting on many of those occasions I would have felt anxious. Feelings, that I call 'collywobbles' as my tummy somersaults in turmoil. This time I choose to depart from my customary practice, formulating possible angles, checking precedence, rules and regulations, reading up literature. Only after such preparation would I consider myself informed and ready. I know now that this is not healthy, realising an emotional response has blocked my ability to think clearly and be present at meetings.

In one sense, anticipation can be said to foresee as I looked for a solution which may have led to premature identification of the actual problem. In turn, this led me to being less sensitive in listening with further potential for conflict. I would have had feelings of distress and guilt too. A contradiction between my self-awareness as the bedrock to my inquiry and the less than perfect reality as it unfolds.

A single bubble of anxiety grips me as I waver on my new stepping stone about agreeing to an open meeting without agenda and whether this is the right one. I appreciate that going to a meeting with fixed ideas may obstruct the underpinnings of dialogue a theme of significance in my work. My belief is based on Isaacs (1999, p. 312) idea that 'human beings create, refine, and share knowledge through conversation'. Hence the context of the discussion needs to open to see beyond what is in front of us and in this way find a way forward. I practice the art of dialogue, where the visceral pain in *Holly*<sup>183</sup> is gone, now I go

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<sup>183</sup> Reflection 16

[to meetings] with openness without solutions or fixed ideas aiming to create a space to explore.

I walk down the corridor. In spite of earlier anxieties, I am making progress along my journey. My ideas on student kind are continuously being refined in working with students who are struggling and in discussion with our partners.

I stop; take a deep breath, holding my vision for student kind in the palm of my hand. My vision of student kind seems so simple. I continue the walk down the grey corridors of power towards the flowing river across the bridge to the meeting. Looking forward to the conversation, I am aware of teasing out and testing this new approach and seeing, sensing if it works with colleagues. I go to the meeting committed to dialogue. Isaacs (1999) declares dialogic leaders cultivate a process of dialogue as a way of being a useful frame for thoughts. So far, some elements in my approach have come to fruition including building on established work towards collaborative working on agreed approaches and communication across HSE, occupational health and student support services and the department.

Pausing, to consider where my inquiry has influenced my work and roles with key members of the department, where the subtle change is visible, I note the following:

- Liaise with authorities across the university

- Review programme specific regulations incorporating programme requirements for professional accreditation.

- Find ways to work within existing structures

- Seek opportunities to dialogue with decision makers at higher levels at the university.

An emerging realisation is that I now see my practice guided by student kind tightly woven within my interpretation of Bohm's assertions that

listening, respecting, suspending and voicing are four practices that are key building blocks to dialogue (Bohm 1996, p. 78).

This quotation clarifies my thoughts and working through 'thinking together,' going forward creating space.

### *Story 2 The meeting*

I begin; we are here to talk about Anna. I am aware of the possibilities; decisions may have outcomes that are far reaching for Anna, given concerns raised about her ability and her future. Balancing between supporting Anna and concerns about ability to fulfil a professional role and service needs. Previously, I might have gone down the route of what are the problems and what are our options. Glad, that I have spent time dwelling with anticipatory thoughts. Previously at such a starting point I would then, have been caught up in my own self-inflicted web chained with negative energy denying me the freedom to create space for dialogue and bring an integrated voice to the table. I check in with myself, considering whether our meeting is dialogical in nature noting a difference to earlier discussions with partners as conversation ebbs and flow.

Anna's tale, patterns of illness over a lengthy period with GP certification for illness. We move to seek a review through re-engagement with the occupational health department in determining support for a fitness to return to work. At the meeting we agree:

- Continued support and communication with Anna;
- Anna to consider her choices and encourage her own decision making
- Reengage with occupational health
- Reaffirm availability of support services
- Support phased return to practice.

The complexities of student dual status, serving two masters comes to the fore.



Afterwards, I wonder was it right to discuss Anna in her absence. Most of the aspects had been raised at an earlier meeting with Anna. The aim was to create a space to dialogue and bring to the surface any organizational concerns appreciating that nothing can be 'a quick fix' imposed on anyone.

Dialogue was useful in clarifying duty of care to both organizations, exploring Anna's rights and the rights of the HS partners and the safety of the people who we serve. There was nothing said that was not shared with Anna. The conversation at the meeting seems now to be a milestone in collaborating together. But there is always more. I wonder was it the right step to consider referral to occupational health and that question is another story.

For me, the significance of the story is about bringing prior knowledge informing the present. At the meeting I move from having nothing to say to illustrating a voice that while informed by my reflections and struggle with insights, now shows enlightenment. This is like small ripples in the ocean, as student kind guides decision making.

Afterwards, listening to the car radio on the way home I hear the words of Christy Moore,<sup>184</sup> it seems that there is much to say about working and collaborating together going forward

With no maps to guide us we steered our own course  
Rode out the storms when the winds were gale force  
Sat out the doldrums in patience and hope  
Working together we learned how to cope .....  
Our true destination's not marked on any charts  
We're navigating to the shores of the heart...

*Story 3: After the meeting, there is always more*

I dwell on why and how the conversation worked, was there support for Anna. I ask a colleague the question and get the answer. 'We have built up trust. It is how you and I work together'. We have gone to meetings first thing in the

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<sup>184</sup> Irish balladeer

morning and worked around constraints of time, travel and venues. We respond to queries, spending time listening rather than simply replying to an e mail. We are working with committed people who trust us. It seems that a further link within dialogue and student kind, the establishment of trust. A popular maxim that goes the round is 'trust is the hardest thing to find and the easiest thing to loose'.

How do I know that trust is present and never taken for granted. Bohm (1998) and Cayer (2005) infer that trust is fundamental to their understanding of approaches to dialogue and embedded within each element. Nevertheless many transformational leaders postulate on the importance of trust and its influence on organization as underrated. Max de Pree (2001) an American leadership author comments<sup>185</sup>

In much of our thinking and talking about how organizations work, the power of one word is regularly underestimated — trust. Trust is an enormous treasure for any organization... Trust doesn't arrive in our possession easily or cheaply, nor does it guarantee to stay around... Trust requires respect — which means we take every person seriously.

Previously, *Back to earth*<sup>186</sup> explored dialogue but neglected trust as inherent within student kind dialogue. Perhaps trust is the cord that ties everything together. I think that there is overlap between many of the tenets in dialogue and trust. Significantly, I now appreciate in a more conscious way, that trust cannot be taken for granted or assumed to be present.

I have had ethical challenges in writing up stories of meetings and the possibility of identifying and exposing colleagues. It is only through this one snippet, that I feel free to document some of my learning without revealing details about meetings where I have failed to be dialogical. After the meeting I continue to be

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<sup>185</sup> [depre.org/...de.../](http://depre.org/...de.../) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2012]

<sup>186</sup> Reflection 17

bothered about the judgment to support a review for Anna with occupational health, a normal process for health service employees with extended sick leave.

I dialogue with myself and question my unformed ideas, wonder why consultation with occupational health is a good thing. I find several articles that clarify my thoughts. (Chih Hoong 2009, Glazier 2002, Sabin 2012, Serra *et al.* 2007).

The dawning realisation is that I don't aim to lead from the front but instead choose to lead myself and understand the intricacies of student kind within a broader organisation within a spirit of servant leadership. Through my work with colleagues seeking to dialogue with others to create ripples. In turn, I can support others to gain an appreciation of the possibilities within this movement. I now realise that it is not enough to search for and find my vision of student kind through inquiry. I must take opportunities to expand and voice this vision. I can't take the time to wait for the storm to pass, as I work towards being student kind. I move to work in a subversive way. I seek occasions to dialogue about fitness to practice issues by a higher authority, sharing my insights around student kind and the tensions between students centred rights and the duty of care to the public and the protection of the university. Referring to the University strategic document in supporting my approach, I quote the plan for 'strong ethical practices that emphasise honesty integrity and respect for all' (University of Limerick, Strategic Plan 2011-2015, p. 26).

I begin to see that though a vague concept, student kind strengthens. I grapple with what for me are enlightening thoughts informed by critical social theory. Instead of frustration, I can move guided by small successes towards the light. Express the vision, explain the vision and extend the vision as advocated by Johns.

The anticipatory thoughts in *Story 1* were useful in guiding the meeting. Listening with patience and presence working to understand rather than be understood and developing trust through an inclusive respect.

Open agendas and risk taking are all conducive to creating a space for dialogue and the development of trust. Zeldin (1999) a philosopher and historian reinforces this idea persuasively by suggesting that conversation is a meeting of minds. In so doing can be a principle instrument of change suggesting

when minds meet they don't just exchange facts; they transform them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thoughts (Zeldin 1999, p. 1633).

Further on

When two people talk with mutual respect and listen with a real interest in understanding another point of view, when they try to put themselves in the place of another, to get inside their skin, they change the world, even if it is only by a minute amount, because they are establishing equality between two human beings (Zeldin 1999, p. 1633).

This idea is extended by Haigh (2005)

good conversation feeds the spirit...confirms that conversations that are intended to be context for professional learning need to involve good content; resist the bounds of definition; be voluntary; happen on common ground; embody safety, trust and care; develop have a future (p. 10).

Significantly this reflection shows how far I have travelled along the route of empowerment and emancipation within a critical social theory framework. Glass (1998) draws upon Lather and Fay's work asserting that

critical theory springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain, that much can be done to alleviate that pain and that the theory has a crucial role to in that process (Glass 1998, p.123).

In a similar vein, my stories with Erica, May, and now Anna reveal suffering, struggle and resilience, far different from the public image of higher education. Learning through appreciation of human vulnerability and resilience helps me come to understand my world of work as it is.

*Story 4 We meet again.*

A week later, Anna arranges to meet, having received a fitness for work certification. I offer her space.

MG: I am here to listen.

Anna: I am not ready to go back, mentioning an 'episode', changing medication.

Anna's struggle and resilience comes to the fore.

Anna: I am tired, sleeping a lot, have no energy, that's why I didn't contact you.

I wonder within my internal dialogue with self. Does Anna want me to make the decisions?

Anna I can't go back, too much is expected of a final year student. I can't go do the FYP. I think I'll return to occupational health for referral back to the mental health service.

MG: You can avail of college services...

We agree to not make decisions about placement today. I am attentive, my insights from a previous story *Back to earth*<sup>187</sup> guide me here, encouraging the student to see that she has choices and that she can lead herself in this process rather than adopt a co-dependency approach. I conclude with my usual take care.

Anna: I would like to meet again.

MG: that is up to you.

I consider why I deferred to a medical authority and return to the literature to explore what is good practice. One of the knock on effects of recession is 'tightening of all services' and a review of absenteeism, a political lobby to reduce what is seen as an unacceptable high level. That is not to say that Anna was not fit to return to work on the day of the review. Traditionally, the medical

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<sup>187</sup> Reflection 17

person determines the fitness to return. Chih Hoong (2009) cautions against 'medicalising disability'. The debate around health professional's fitness to work is the subject of a systematic review by Serra *et al.* (2007) highlighting the large number of people involved. They identified; doctor, worker, employer and the university, all with varying viewpoints. Serra *et al.* found that one quarter of the 39 articles in the review did not address a decision making process.

I am not alone in this quandary. I feel submerged in a sea of complexity that brings together employment legislation, scope of practice, accountability and the rights of the student and guidelines. In addition there is a murky area of the student role as worker and performance expectations. It is unclear how much accommodation of role can be given. Now that I realise that this is another dilemma seeing stories intertwined with student kind dialogue. I respect Anna's choice. The tension between her rights, not contradicting the authority of another, a helix like pattern inherent in a story, plotting a collaborative voice.

Where does this leave me? I move from saying nothing to using guidelines and literature to bringing these elements together. There is potential in working within servant leadership to balance this tension through dialogue. Zeldin (1999) proposes that conversation is the principle instrument of change as there is a growing realisation that laws are

incapable of altering mentalities and that change is superficial if mentalities are not altered (Zeldin 1999, p. 1633).

### *The afterward*

Questioning assumptions.

The mechanism of deferral to medical authority

Who will act as an advocate in occupational health discussion?

Moving beyond rules and regulations

Autonomy, resilience, integration of voice

Sustaining and extending the ripples and influence

Servant leadership

I ask that students lead themselves, but do I lead myself, where is my authority autonomy and the 'three e's'<sup>188</sup> as I learn the steps of the dance. I seek to find and use foresight acknowledging that:

You can we know the dancer from the dance (Yeats 1928)<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Critical social theory( Fay) enlightenment empowerment and emancipation

<sup>189</sup> Yeats, W.B.(1972) Among School Children *The Tower Selected Poetry London: MacMillan Ltd [1928]*

## **A week in the life [exploring being and becoming]**

Reflection 19, April 2013

Possibility and change become growth within the shape of time that we  
call a day  
(O'Donohue 1997, p. 164-165).

Continuing

The new day deepens what has already happened and unfolds what is surprising, unpredictable and creative. You may wish to change your life... but your new vision remains merely talk until it enters the practice of your day.

Responding to O'Donohue's comment,<sup>190</sup> echoes of past reflections influence my present, unfolding as the week goes on. It is a week, where I expose the contradictions between an ideal and the real world of my practice. It shows student kind as a lived reality, a theory in action. It is uneven, unbalanced but is this not how real life is lived? Student kind flowing, as is life.

*Friday: All is not what it seems*

Working with colleagues, preparing a publication has taken a long time. I had forgotten the pleasure of working together. We circulate a draft, receive feedback. Thoughtful probes stimulate thinking, making editing easier, a slow task.

Later, in the day walking down the grey corridor I'm not looking forward to my next task. I am preparing feedback on a draft chapter, from an MSc student, whom we shall call Gail. It should be peaceful, reviewing the draft. Receiving feedback<sup>191</sup> has set me questioning. I am unsettled, exasperated, wanting to getting this job done before I go home.

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<sup>190</sup> Writer on Celtic wisdom and spirituality.

<sup>191</sup> Feedback on draft Chapters 1 and 2



What is the best way to give feedback? Gail has had less time to prepare the methodology.<sup>192</sup> Deadlines loom, Gail works hard, wants to do well, is committed. The draft requires work. I question whether I am demanding too much, going beyond expectations at this level.

Is this about the theory of research or doing research? Does the end justify the means? Could there be better ways to undertake a dissertation? A question, I frequently pose. Sometimes, I feel out of 'synch' with my colleagues when discussing supervision. Can Fay (1987) help me to understand how things are the way they are?

At our last meeting, I could hear and see Gail's stress, remembering how she held her work, hands shaking. I wonder how beneficial was that meeting for everyone? Did I add to her stress? It is good to be aware of these tensions before meeting Gail. I pay attention to creating a space for student kind dialogue aiming for meaningful feedback. Recalling my feedback from colleagues and supervisors

- Line by line commentary with 30-100 comments throughout the text [colour annotated] original text submerged.
- Email commentary.
- Jargon like text with explain/ expand/ can you make such claims?
- Summary comments to guide a discussion.
- Thoughtful commentary to stimulate critical thinking and questioning of taken for granted assumptions.

Previously, I have given time to the detail, paying less attention to the person and hearing what they have to say. I stop and think of the tension between my

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<sup>192</sup> Qualitative design

understanding, and Gail's interpretation. I review the post graduate handbook,<sup>193</sup> whereby

at each supervisory meeting feedback should be given, future actions and the date of the next meeting agreed... supervisors should give both written and verbal feedback and ensure that students understand and act on their comments and suggestions (p. 11).

This seems reasonable and yet the **how** to 'ensure' feedback is heard is missing. I have attended workshops, heard advice about summaries and electronic records. Trigger questions that give structure. Nevertheless, despite the best intentions, what the student experiences seems less clear. Power, within supervisory relationships, means a balance in sending and receiving feedback. Students are human, vulnerable, while the work is cognitive in nature, managing time lines reviewing work is interwoven with emotion and stress.

Am I seeking to give feedback to 'cover my tracks' rather than what is useful for Gail? Traditionally, my focus has been on the written work. The insights gained through my reflections guide me now. I appreciate that feedback is more than giving information. At the most basic level more than protecting my role, 'fixing' work for them, is in itself disempowering. There is no easy way of knowing the effectiveness of what I did and do, until the submission of the next draft. These tensions are not stressful, instead they clarify my thinking. I plan to be thoughtful, present; listening for the conversation, checking what is heard. I realise, while I have moved through being student kind when interacting with students who are struggling, now need to embrace this vision across the supervision aspect of my role.

The Open University<sup>194</sup> gives 'useful' guidance on feedback<sup>195</sup> recommends the use of the 'feedback sandwich'.<sup>196</sup> While useful, now seems inadequate, open to the challenge of being supervisor led. I choose to practice my vision, entering

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<sup>193</sup> Post Graduate Handbook November 2012

<sup>194</sup> Open University [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013]

<sup>195</sup> means that feedback meets the needs of the learners and the obligations of the tutor

<sup>196</sup> Give good news, bad news and praise and encouragement for next draft.

into what I understand as a more student kind space. In light of these thoughts, I am guided by ideas at thesis whisperer.<sup>197</sup> Here, Mewburn<sup>198</sup> asserts that

**feedback is supposed to be like food**, [her emphasis] providing me with sustenance and nutrition, letting me know how I am going (sustenance) and give me some ideas for next time (nutrition).

I move towards the notion of student kind dialogue within my role.

#### *Monday: Meeting with Gail*

Before meeting Gail,<sup>199</sup> my colleague and joint supervisor, taking time to clear our heads. Together we walk over the bridge, the water soaked air, washes my tangled web of negative energy away. I appreciate the importance of balance and harmony in preparing bringing the mind home, ready to be present.

At the meeting I notice the pallor on Gail's face.

MG: how are things?

I hear a tale of working nights followed by three, 12 hour shifts. Gail has had 4 hours sleep before our meeting.

MG: It's important to hear about your reality. What would you like to discuss?...

Out comes a notebook, Gail talks about her analysis of themes, intermingled with supporting quotes. The conversation reveals an understanding of qualitative interviewing and data analysis beyond what is written in the draft. Much of the time, I am listening, as Gail poses questions. Gail's responses suggest that the meeting was valuable. As the evening draws to a close, I invite Gail to summarise her learning and plans for the next draft. Gail knows so much more than what has been written. For me the meeting is much more than conforming to a linear supervisory role.<sup>200</sup> It seems that the conversation flows, a little eddy for student

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<sup>197</sup>Thesis whisperer, web site for post graduate students [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012]

<sup>198</sup> Ibid Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January 2013]

<sup>199</sup> post graduate student regarding the reviewed chapter written about on Friday

<sup>200</sup> Post Graduate Handbook November 2012

kind dialogue. I am more alert to what Burnard calls 'staying awake' noticing my body posture, eye contact while listening (Freshwater 2003).

The importance of conversation is supported by Jawahar (2006) drawing attention to the interface between the way feedback is received and what students do with the information. Nicol (2010) goes further claiming dissatisfaction by everyone regarding written feedback and writes about 'impoverished dialogue'. Hence, for me, time spent preparing for feedback is valuable, a prerequisite for dialogue with research students. There are dilemmas in managing time when working and supervising increasing numbers of students. Gail leaves with what I see as renewed enthusiasm and a plan.

Colleague: it's all about time to listen.

MG: is feedback about space to work through and clarifying ideas?

Colleague: Yes. Listening, having a conversation together is helpful in remaining positive before giving feedback. Early drafts can be messy and face to face is the only way.

Previously, we have talked about power imbalance when both of us are present. We talk some more about being in the right place, being ready, being available for students, best achieved when supervisors make time for conversations together.

The experience with Gail and the subsequent conversation helps me see the usefulness of embodying student kind. Moving, beyond, working with students who are struggling, beyond the classroom, exploring wider dimensions to my role. Practicing my vision in this way is critical, if I wish to be authentic to myself. Stepping stones in developing caring relationships within professional boundaries. Johns (2013) cites Jones and Jones (1996, p. 47)

Believe in the vision of you

Practice the vision

Become the vision

*Tuesday: The quiet student*

08.50 I walk down the long grey corridor, ready for a communication lab session with first year BSc students.

Good morning!

Silence.

MG: communication first thing is challenging?

Mumbles.

I recall, the pressured student timetable, crossing to and fro across the campus for 11.00, little time for coffee and chat.

MG: Let's work smart and finish with enough time before next lecture.

I notice one student, face expressionless, no eye contact. I hold this thought, taking a deep breath, smile, holding my vision of being student kind.

We watch *Breaking bad news*,<sup>201</sup> using a worksheet to generate discussion. Previously, feedback was based upon an open question, however, more vocal students have lots to contribute and some students seem to say little.

How I do things has changed. At our reflective community we dialogue, Adenike<sup>202</sup> talks about the 'quiet teacher'. I have been chewing over this idea while working with students. Now, co creation comes to the fore as I learn to pay attention to the 'quiet student'. I invite feedback, opening a space for conversation, giving everyone in turn, an opportunity to contribute. Positive support for this simple pedagogy seen in student lab reports;

I like it when you give each of us a chance to say something

And

it is good to hear everyone's ideas.

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<sup>201</sup>Buckman,R. and Baile ,W.F. (1998) DVD

<sup>202</sup>Member of reflective community a teacher educator

Now this approach is embedded in my practice. As we go around the room the synergy develops.<sup>203</sup> The particular **quiet student** offers valuable points, stimulating further discussion among her peers. I note her body language, sensing no nervousness about speaking, no embarrassment, an informed review. There is no way of knowing the thoughts of that student, always unanswered questions. I am more aware of the significance in responding to differing learning styles in groups. Finally, one student says:

it is really good to talk about these things and hear what everyone has to say and share the ideas and know that many of us have the same fears and feelings.

Another student writes<sup>204</sup>

There is so much to learning communicating, trying to do this at one time, listening making eye contact watching body language and the tone of voice and then try to establish a therapeutic relationship and trust all at one time and it is all about patients. It's very hard and I am nervous

A reminder of the complexity of learning strategies when working with first year students. I note my enhanced ability to diffuse any negative energy from rushing to be on time.<sup>205</sup> Being composed, no longer frustrated, by what I interpret as disinterest, taking time to be alert, open to learning spaces in labs. I am aware of how I respond to a student who appears sleepy or disinterested perhaps not a 'morning' person, while I am enthusiastic, ready for discussion. I hold my beliefs, in creating a space for learning, for students to flourish a continuing tension in a programme that is increasingly filled with content and outcome driven.

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<sup>203</sup> Later confirmed in reflective comments from the lab sheets

<sup>204</sup> Students submit a reflection at each session.

<sup>205</sup> *Holding the space*, Reflection 2

*Wednesday: Guided reading*

I am working with first years, a critical reading conversation on dignity based on research by Baillie (2009). At first, students are quiet. I wonder is this the right call, will the session work? I am mindful of the importance of having patience and working with first years. We take a few minutes to look over the paper, their copies marked highlighted and dog eared. [relief]

We begin with an open conversation, building on feedback from students and my awareness from the quiet student story. Everyone contributes, as we work our way through the paper. Students weave their experience of first placement and relate to the quotes. We discuss the media coverage of the publication of the, Francis report, in an Irish context the Leas Cross report.<sup>206</sup> Feedback acknowledges the value of tutorial style, demystifying research, interlinking the art and science of nursing. Student comments

We focus too much on the procedure and not on the patient

Opened my eyes to the meaning of dignity

Can bring it [dignity] to my own practice

The quotes [by participants] throughout really stuck in my head

Working in a group was good I picked up 'more' much easier to understand as a group

When everyone in the group contributed and made it a lot easier

I hadn't a clue and learning how to analyse articles will be great for future assignments as I haven't been able to do anything with the long list 'of recommended reading'.

Fantastic class today based on gaining understanding and knowledge about how to read an article

I learnt much more that if I had read it alone

Brilliant! Discussing this together and grasped a lot more by doing it in class

I can take what I learned about dignity how to make pts[patients] feel respected and more comfortable.

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<sup>206</sup> Irish government investigation into care of the older person

### *Stepping stones*

Questioning my teaching.

I note 24 articles on the reading list for a module that I facilitated last semester. Who is the list for, is it a way of covering content rather than adult learning? I believe students do read these articles, do they need or would they benefit from assistance to make sense of them? I now develop the conversational approach with post graduate students who have now returned to study. I draw on their story experiences but the paradox relates to meeting the learning outcome of the sessions. I take the opportunity to create an opening for dialogue as a facilitation approach. An endeavour that is a happenstance. I must embed this as a learning strategy. Cowman (1995) found that 'deeper levels' of learning for students, within the university setting is not always a prerequisite for acceptable grades. In addition, Patterson and Pratt (2007, p. 85) argue that students, constrained by money and time are compelled to take a 'surface level' learning style to finish the course. The question remains as to the possibility of these students developing critical thinking abilities in a curriculum that is fast becoming knowledge banking.

### *Thursday: Just another cup of coffee*

Meet Michael<sup>207</sup> a friend for coffee and hear about his voluntary work, visiting a client a student who is broke. Michael says that while being careful about client confidentiality, he wants me to be aware of these stories. Student bills include; bus €20 a week, food €25. Little left for rent, heat and college stuff. Michael describes seeing this student wrapped in coat, in a room lit by a single bulb, near the table full of books without heat.<sup>208</sup> The student takes showers at her sisters and receives food vouchers. Michael says that this student has made huge life changes to come to college, to get out of the poverty trap. I listen to the

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<sup>207</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>208</sup> Former flat mate ran up €700 electricity bill



struggle, how she doesn't fit in with the old life, wondering does she fit in with a new life?

We encourage students from underrepresented groups, but as revealed in a previous reflection *Money Matters Erica's story*,<sup>209</sup> I wonder how helpful can an institution be? The North wind freezes my cheeks as I walk over the living bridge back to my cosy ivory tower. The weatherman announces that temperatures will plummet again tonight.

There is talk in the media about rises in student poverty and the administration of student grants is in chaos this year. Still, over 2000 Limerick students without grants.<sup>210</sup>

CJ suggests that I use material from media sources in highlighting issues that are silenced. I search and find a typical heading from the website of journal.ie

Students' unions hand out food bags as grant crisis continues ( 14/01/13),  
[16,361 Views].

The union at Galway-Mayo IT is handing out bags of food to hard-up students as SUSI continues catching up on grant payments.

And the following posts:

I hate the stereotypes being floated around the journal about students.  
I'm currently sitting in an icebox of a flat, drinking tea to stay warm.  
I'm a mature student, I just about manage There's young lads who I  
spend my day with sipping on tap water instead of eating. I've never  
seen them eat. They don't look healthy and they're not doing it for fun.

My universe is different from the world of inequality and injustice. At college my best learning took place while chatting with fellow students. I now understand students may have no money for luxuries. Meeting for coffee, pleasures of

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<sup>209</sup> Reflection 13

<sup>210</sup> Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), the new body responsible for paying grants to first-year students.

working in such a privileged setting. I now see my world as a naïve and simplistic middle class view.

Back, to Michael's student. How does she manage? Bus fares for placements, some sites are not on bus routes. Is this how students exit the programme silently leaving? Just as Erica in *Money Matters*.

#### *Time is running out*

I meet May<sup>211</sup> who continues to be distressed. Previous reflections have described my dialogue with May. Despite the best of intentions, May has been unable to complete course work. A symptom of her suffering is apparent, when May doesn't engage with her supervisor for her final year project. Many students at this time of the year face problems. For May, this seems to be a bigger problem, deadlines have passed by.

May did not respond to the invitation to attend a student status committee meeting, where options are clarified. Time had been spent explaining the process. She felt unable to come. Afterwards May said that she just couldn't face it. Misery.

May has led every step of the journey. On the one hand May wants to return to an unfinished placement and the tension whereby such options will not be considered until the academic work (FYP) is completed.

Is any of this fair as May's past lurks in the background.

The dialogue has taken place over a year and a half. The future looks bleak in terms of completing the programme. There are less options and possibilities for a return to placement. Again, the undertow of tension between the demands of a student being fit for purpose and supporting individual wellbeing looms like a

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<sup>211</sup> Pseudonym

spectre. Previous reflections<sup>212</sup> have considered these dilemmas. May holds her dream about becoming a nurse. At the moment, the option of being awarded a degree without a professional qualification is something May resists.

I try to create space for dialogue, to give May time to make her own choices about a very uncertain future. Sometimes, I wonder is this enough, holding a vision of being student kind, seeing the struggle, offering little, striving to be authentic. During the meeting I 'stay awake'<sup>213</sup> while listening. I notice how I say;

MG: What's happening? It's hard.

I watch myself, as I watch May, as always noticing her hands. O'Donohue (2000, p. 86) echoes my belief that human hands are powerful images. Mostly, I stay silent. I draw on Freshwater's (2003) commentary, that silence is more complex than I have ever imagined. Freshwater writes of categories of silence including a positive silence being embodied by intimacy and harmony. I hold my vision close, giving space to listen, mindful of seeing silence as a connection. O'Donohue (1997, p. xxii) describes a 'resonant heart in the depth of silence'. How do I know this to be helpful, rather than destructive?

The emotional intensity of offering space for student kind dialogue is taxing. It is not counselling. I am concerned about my boundaries, in the limitations of my role with May. I pause. Then I ask myself who's **needs** am I meeting? I find Kearney (1996) though writing from a palliative care perspective has resonance

unless we are capable of being aware of our own 'woundedness', we will mistakenly believe that as caregivers we always have the answers to other peoples' problems Kearney (p. 151).

The meeting concludes with May planning to meet her supervisor.

May: in one way I want you [me] to make the decisions for me, but I know why it has got to be my choice. I alone know what is possible.

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<sup>212</sup> *Helix*, Reflection 18

<sup>213</sup> Freshwater(2003, p . 36)

May is both resilient and fragile in managing her opposing and conflicting tensions. May's ideal, her reality on the ground and all in between. I am reminded of Yeats.<sup>214</sup>

I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Significantly, I now value being available with May, in the unfolding moment. This is all that student kind is, this is enough, recalling the poem, letting go.

Later in the day several meetings leave me with more work to do in terms of curriculum review for a postgraduate programme. The schedule involves blended learning and 6 days on campus with lectures back to back all day. No breaks. Little time, to mix and mingle, get a cup of coffee. I hear a discussion about reducing the number of modules. Bohm's (1996) writing flows, I now see his understanding of coherence as way of living student kind. Student kind is more than being with students who are struggling, extending my expression of my vision an educator.

I smile, finding my voice, recalling the buzz word – 'the quality of the student experience', raising the question in relation to today. I comment, that until now I hadn't realized how crammed their day was. Asking what are we trying to achieve and where does this fit with the quality learning, if the last lecture starts at 6? What about the coffee, quoting T.S Eliot

I have measured out my life in coffee spoons.

My narrative shows, I have changed, revealing some small steps from enlightenment towards emancipation, described by Fay (1987). I have an understanding of how things are the way they are. To date, there is little evidence of my influence within the greater organization. I am a member of the

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<sup>214</sup> Yeats, W.B. (1899) He wishes for the cloths of heaven from *The wind among the reeds* *W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry* London: Macmillan London Ltd [1972] p.35

quality review group and this offers some potential. So, instead of feeling removed and isolated from the views of colleagues, I now see things more clearly, informed by chaos theory (Wheatley 2006). I begin to appreciate organisational complexity.

### *Spring day*

Sun shines across the river, lightening my spirits. I make time to have a coffee before the *Hand Massage Workshop*. This is a contribution in collaboration with colleagues in support of the *Lifelong Learning Festival*.<sup>215</sup>

I arrive early, taking some time away from the desk, despite the temptation to keep working my way through never ending emails etc. This is part of caring for self, being composed for the workshop. The room at the carers group is functional, as described by a colleague. We bring candles. I bring spring flowers. We mix and mingle chatting about the session. Hints of stories of caring and burden ripple through the room. We show the DVD, chat and respond to comments and hand out copies. We invite participants to have a hand massage with the intention of showing them the skill. Far from what happened?

In this space, I listen as Ella<sup>216</sup> tells a story of caring for her daughter who is in a wheelchair and the sudden death of her husband last Christmas.

Ella doesn't drive, doesn't get out much. Now Ella has hurt her back during the week. Ella speaks about the struggle caring for her daughter. Ella had never been to the carers group, now she thinks that it might be good to come. She lives nearby.

Ella: the hand massage is lovely and relaxing.

MG: taking care of *you* is important.

Mostly I listen and then listen some more. I help Ella with her jacket.

MG: are there any daffodils in your garden.

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<sup>215</sup> Dymphna Tuohy and Ruth Ryan

<sup>216</sup> Pseudonym

Ella: my husband looked after the garden, a few.

I hand Ella February gold daffodils from my garden.

The sunny yellow screams, far removed from any sense of happiness or spring in Ella's life.

Ella: I can't look back [smiling]

I smile.

I listen, some more as another women, Linda<sup>217</sup> tells me about massaging her husband's legs. He has Alzheimer's disease. They are married 40 years, now resident in a nursing home. Linda says that she will bring the DVD to the staff. Linda might try using it with her husband.

Tears trickle quietly slowly down Linda's beautifully made up cheeks.

Masks of sadness

I keep listening

Linda: caring for the carers<sup>218</sup> just what is needed. He cannot speak.

MG: it must be hard, a few moments pass.

I whisper you are his voice; Linda needs to look after Linda.

Another moment passes, as I learn how a mother rubs her son's hand when he is excited or agitated. Her son is 47 and has Downs Syndrome.

Later, we tidy up, as all good nurses do, sharing similar stories.

Kearney (2002, p. 156) words come to life:

we live our lives by stories that need to be told.

My colleagues note how people seem to like being listened to, how privileged we are, how participants open up, sharing their stories. I need days like this to wash

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<sup>217</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>218</sup> Voluntary organisation

away the flotsam and jetsam, to appreciate the potential within the creation of space to dialogue and connect with people.

As the afternoon unfolds I wonder about our response, our connection to each story. How as a threesome we worked well together and identify the benefits in jointly facilitating the workshop. We identify some improvements for the future. Due to bereavement, no representative of the carers group attended the workshop. Such representation would be helpful rather than us giving information. We will address this point. Some participants had never been inside the door of [organisation] or knew about the support available for carers. The entrance is not the most inviting.

Days like this, tales of hardship and burden. The word synchronicity runs through my body. On the desk, a book by Senge (2004) defines synchronicity

many people sense and are drawn together around a new possibility that's unfolding. There is something about the situation that resonates with people ... they're drawn to it and then the magic begins to unfold (Senge 2004, p. 159).

This afternoon's experience does not neatly fit in with the main concern of my inquiry on student kind. I suggest that this happenstance offers a conscious participation a presence, authenticity embracing dialogue through being available for people.

Finally, one of the participants, a radio show presenter asks will one of us give a radio interview tomorrow about the workshop. I grudgingly agree.

This is way out of my comfort zone. I recall that there is a protocol to be followed when dealing with the press. I learnt about this when doing a telephone interview a year ago so get working.<sup>219</sup> I mail the communications and media personnel, check contact details for any resulting requests for similar workshops. I clear my thoughts in readiness for the interview.

*Friday: The aftermath*

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<sup>219</sup> Sunday Times, 29 January 2012

Finally just found out that I have another new module next semester, c'est la vie. Pause, back to reality and what a privilege it is to hear these stories. I remember Ella, Linda, May and others struggling in this world and the lyrics of Van Morrison<sup>220</sup>

These are the days, the time is now  
There is no past, there's only future  
There's only here, there's only now.

It is hard to balance the emotion and the facts – it is not the accuracy of the recall we interested in rather an illustration of complexity of the messy everyday world of practice as in a world of chaos. So the story comes from practice, then we reflect, using guidance and literature to change our understanding and hence bring this understanding forward to our practice. This is taken a step further in an article that I have been reading by Pryce (2002, p. 298) writing from a sociological stance suggesting

Reflective practice should be concerned with change and must engage with evolving patterns and systems of social interaction and meaning within context ...that the focus is less with the experience of the individual practitioner, but rather with the wider cultural contexts in which he or she is a social actor...The transformative potential of reflective practice lies with enabling the imagination of the actor to re-engage with the fictions of the socially constructed 'realities' of both the institutional culture and the self in the search for the authentic.

Is the transformative potential of reflective practice about embracing the political text as well as the subjective narrative and

telling stories of everyday life, as it is, as well as how it seems to be (Pryce 2002, p. 309).

As I walk across the living bridge, across the plaza, I consider my story a journey focusing on experiences of students in difficulty be they health, emotional, financial, professional or academic worries and student kind emerging as belief to guide and embody my practice as a nurse educator. As I type thoughts flood in, a never ending hermeneutic spiral. In a sense, the very contradiction expressed by Anais Nin

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<sup>220</sup> Many evenings spent with friends sipping wine and listening to this music part of my Dingle life



The role of a writer is not to say what we all can say, but what we are unable to say.<sup>221</sup>

Is it possible that I move to show how nothing has changed but everything has changed? I am part of and apart in a community organisation. A view epitomised by Gormley's sculpture *Together and Apart*, positioned centrally at the main university plaza.<sup>222</sup>

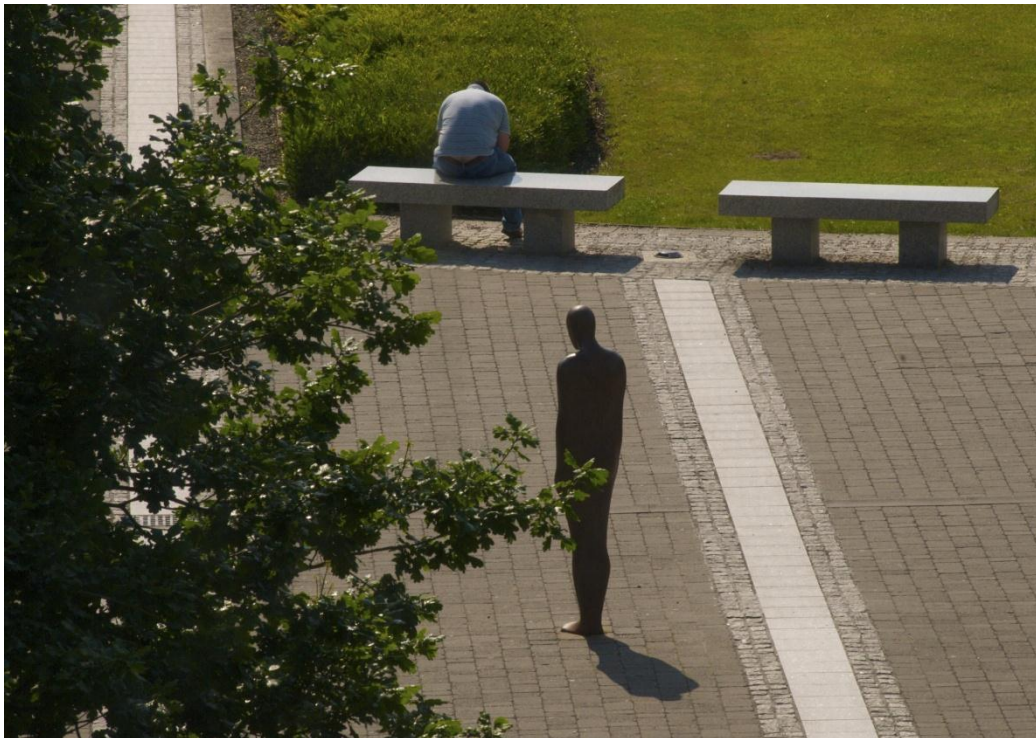


Plate 4.1, Antony Gormley's sculpture *Together and Apart*

Finding myself, finding my style, becoming interwoven in my life. Hence, I return to Wordsworth's call; 'fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.' As Dennis O'Driscoll (2008) interviewing Seamus Heaney quotes

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<sup>221</sup>The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. 5, in *An Anthology of Women's Writing* (1975) by Margaret Kaminski

<sup>222</sup> The sculpture aims to act as a link between the main university buildings and the library connecting the collective a former with the solitary, contemplative nature of scholarship represented by the latter. Students meet here, choosing to be photographed beside it on graduation day. (Lawless, 2009) in *Together and apart Irish Arts Review* Spring p. 144 . Gormley said that 'space exists outside the door and inside the head. My work is to make a human being in space.'

truth could be told slant- from different vantage point that brings a new integrity, clarity and resonance - a slant that reveals hidden potential and possibilities of things (p. 467).

## **Summary**

In summary this chapter has presented my narrative through a series of nineteen individual reflections whereby each reflection is influenced by previous reflections. The change and transformation is subjective, subtle and continuous. It unfolds, flowing back and forth. A process based on guidance and dialogue within a reflective community. The next chapter explores the insights gained throughout the narrative in greater depth informed by literature.

## Chapter 4 Being available, becoming student kind

*A line can be shaped into letters and knots, one can follow it by foot or in thought and might come back to its starting point. And what would happen if the linear direction of time were to change its direction*  
(Máire Ní Scannláin)<sup>223</sup>

### Introduction

In Chapter 3, *Narrative*, I set out my narrative towards realising my vision of being and becoming a reflective practitioner. At the core of this narrative is being available to student nurses within a particular type of enabling relationship called student kind, in order to facilitate students in becoming patient-kind. Throughout the narrative I plant insights which I now explore more deeply, informed by literature, following the third and fourth dialogical movements of Johns (2010) reflexive narrative approach. The chapter is structured around three inter-related elements

Emerging mindfulness as spirituality  
Being available, becoming student kind  
Broadening the landscape

To guide the representation of diverse insights I draw upon Celtic imagery, as a backdrop to using and adapting the Being Available Template as an interpretative framework to weave student kind into a more coherent whole.

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<sup>223</sup> Scannláin, M., Ní (2009) *Foclóirín Línte agus Snaidhmeanna/Words Lines and Knots* Dingle: Púca Press

## Celtic motifs

Celtic circle and knot imagery engraved on ancient manuscripts and stones<sup>224</sup> show a rhythm of nature and divinity as an ever evolving pattern (O'Donohue 1997, p. 18). Celtic imagery is a sign of, physical and spiritual crossing of paths, expressing endurance of life, love and faith.<sup>225</sup> In this way, the knots become a symbol of the spiritual journey itself.<sup>226</sup> Leaver, comments

With their [knots] lines ever running to and fro, back and forth, crossing over and under each other, and returning to where they began only to start over again. They bring a sense of eternal moving and progress.<sup>227</sup>



Figure 4.1, Exemplar of a Celtic knot pattern

Such an understanding of Celtic knots and spirals symbolises the hermeneutic circle of being and becoming, reflecting the nature of student kind, aware of how understanding shifts as insights deepen. The metaphor serves me well. As suggested in Chapter 2 a reflexive narrative, that reveals a concept student kind is a holistic idea, not easily broken down into discrete categories.

## Emerging mindfulness as spirituality

One key way, that I become available in relationships with students, is through a sense of mindfulness, drawing on Celtic spirituality, an expression of a more philosophical shift in my thinking. Awareness of a spiritual element to

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<sup>224</sup> Illustrated in passage tombs in Newgrange, Co. Meath and Co Kerry

<sup>225</sup> These symbols have roots from pagan times and have found their way into modern spirituality

<sup>226</sup> Historical texts depict Celtic Christian monks living in a state of wandering and pilgrimage.

<sup>227</sup> Rev. Dr. Leaver Celtic spirituality, [www.gbmc.org/journey/articles/celtic.htm](http://www.gbmc.org/journey/articles/celtic.htm) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013]

mindfulness came to the fore in the Chapter 1, *Setting Out*. This has become a more substantive thread in my being available, becoming student kind. The context of *Spring of [Un] planned Pregnancy*,<sup>228</sup> is St Brigid's<sup>229</sup> day, the traditional Irish coming of spring.

Another narrative reveals nature, weather, seasonal imagery, creating for me a sense of peace, stillness and calmness integral to my spiritual being.

Atlantic waves caress me

An Autumn plan materialises.<sup>230</sup>

Again

And voices of silence

Christmas feathered snow falls lightly

Frozen branches laden down.<sup>231</sup>

As the *Holly* reflection unfolds, my sense of alienation, grappling to find a way towards transformation, is seen when writing

Now red berries offer cheer

Remembering prickly leaves protect the berry

Natures form has chance and chaos

Heralding the solstice

Bringing me back to my roots

I am humbled

I am privileged to see me now thorns and all

The visceral pain in my side has lifted.<sup>232</sup>

Noting emotions, in *Money matters, Erica's story*

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<sup>228</sup> Reflection 7

<sup>229</sup> St Brigid is a key female figure in Celtic spirituality. Traditionally school children in Ireland, celebrate the coming of spring on her feast day by making special crosses, linking early Christianity and modern spirituality.

<sup>230</sup> *Tide turns towards transformation*, Reflection 11

<sup>231</sup> *Echoing voices*, Reflection 12

<sup>232</sup> *Holly*, Reflection 16

I now take a deep breath pause, aware of my tensions breathing in calmness.<sup>233</sup>

In so doing, I become aware of what I am doing, while I am doing it, following the first cue in the MSR 'bring the mind home' (Johns 2009). This foregrounds my sense of mindfulness as 'a quality of mind that notices what is present, without judgement, without interference' (Goldstein 2002, p. 89).

Langer (2000) writes of engaging with sensitivity to new things and noticing context. Interest in mindfulness is gaining momentum. Focusing on mindfulness as a base to stress reduction (MBSR) has been described as a strategy in reducing burnout, promoting self-care and well-being for health professionals (Irving *et al.* 2009). Seminal work by Kabat Zinn, (2003) reports that MBSR programmes aim to help participants who long for 'peace of mind, body and soul'. Such meditative practice aims for mindfulness awareness through

paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment (Kabat Zinn 2003, p. 144).

This definition is in keeping with Johns (2013, p. 2) description

being mindful of self, either within or after experience, as if a mirror in which a practitioner can view and focus self within the context of an experience, in order to confront, understand and move towards resolving contradiction between one's vision and actual practice.

Epstein (1999) supports this view describing mindfulness as an extension of the concept of reflective practice, claiming 'mindful practice' helps increase self-awareness of what is happening around self and in so doing enabling the person to act with compassion.

Vision is key to realising compassionate relational care and according to Johns' view (2013, p. 3-4) mindfulness has two levels

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<sup>233</sup> *Money Matters, Erica's story*, Reflection 13

intention to hold and realise a vision of practice,... a transcendental level concerned with spiritual growth.

Carmody *et al.* (2008),<sup>234</sup> report a relationship between increased mindfulness and spirituality and decreased psychological distress. Koenig (2012, p. 3)<sup>235</sup> reviewing patient care and the relationship between mental and physical health distinguishes spirituality from all other things through it's 'connection to what is sacred, the *transcendent*'.

Such a subjective and nebulous view of mindfulness as expressed in spirituality spans across disciplines of archaeology, Celtic studies, philosophy, religion and popular literature. Davies (2001, p. 187) a historian describes a sceptical view of 'new age philosophising, searching for rediscovery of self.' The eastern philosophies of Dalai Lama hold mindfulness at its core

The essence of spiritual practice is your attitude toward others. When you have a pure, sincere motivation, then you have the right attitude toward others based on kindness, compassion, love and respect.<sup>236</sup>

My interpretation of spirituality is in accord with Dali Lama, and Bevis and Watson (1989) and supported by the Royal College of Nursing suggesting spirituality as fundamental to practice (Royal College of Nursing 2011). Mindfulness is revealed as a fusion of science, spirituality and leadership as 'different facets of a single way of being' (Senge *et al.* 2004, p. 212). My narrative seeks understanding in managing emotions, leading self in enhancing my practice. A search, in keeping with Palmer's (2007, p. 2) view, whereby cognition, emotion and spirit are interdependent, in wholeness.

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<sup>234</sup>44 participants at Massachusetts Medical School Mindfulness based stress reduction MBSR program, using Mindfulness Attention and Awareness Scale, Toronto Mindfulness Scale, Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy.

<sup>235</sup>Duke University Director, Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health

<sup>236</sup>Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, head of state and spiritual leader of Tibet, awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize

These descriptions have resonance for my inquiry holding a vision grounded in the ordinary lived role as a nurse educator. My claim is supported by Maslow, originator of the hierarchy of human needs, suggesting that the 'the sacred' is in the ordinary in daily life (Maslow 1970, 1999). My everyday as lived is seen in *A week in the life [exploring being and becoming.]*<sup>237</sup> Ordinariness has been identified within reflection by Taylor (2010)<sup>238</sup> as a way of seeing the events of everyday life, seeing a fresh perspective on aspects that have been taken for granted. Thus spirituality and mindfulness are relevant to developing practice in a world where habits and routines prevail.

Senge *et al.* (2004) suggest that the relationship between spirituality and professional practice has not been popular. Perhaps people have difficulty in acknowledging that there is a relationship? Perhaps the nature of such a nebulous concept poses challenges for researchers? Yet, awareness of the influence of spirituality, in my quest for and expression of vision, sustains my ability to be mindful, living a student kind vision in student relationships.

The use of such ideals raises questions around the tensions of how I can realise my vision in practice as explored through the Being Available Template. While mindfulness expressed through my spirituality is not explicit in the text of the Being Available Template, it has gained momentum in my inquiry. This was confirmed when drafting this chapter, struggling with the template in breaking down the elements and holding the parts whole. In an essence of co-creation, Johns comments, that he 'had always seen mindfulness as a thread running through the 6 influences'.<sup>239</sup>

Thus, spiritually based mindfulness is integral to being available. For me a sense of spiritual mindfulness opens doors of perception, illuminating student kind. As Mayeroff (1971, p. 14) suggests

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<sup>237</sup> A week in the life [exploring being and becoming], Reflection 19

<sup>238</sup> Australian nurse academic

<sup>239</sup> Feedback 17 July 2013



With the growth of an idea comes a deeper understanding of what its basic assumptions are, what it can and cannot do, and a clear sense of what is relevant and irrelevant for its further development.

## **The Being Available Template**

To give substance to the idea of a becoming student kind as a reflective educator, in Chapter 2, I discussed the template and my interpretation of it in an educational context. The re-visioned template, highlights its dynamic nature underpinned by emerging mindfulness and spirituality (Figure 4.2) - being available, becoming student kind.

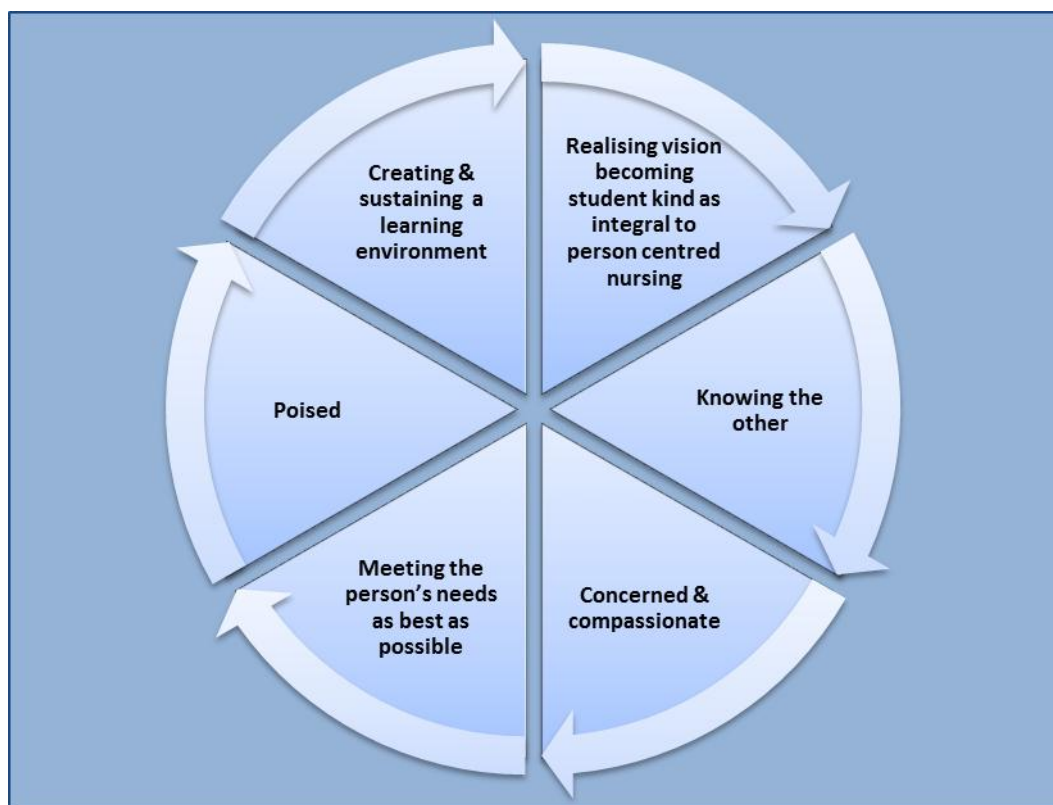


Figure 4. 2, Being available, becoming student kind

Analysis suggests that for me, becoming student kind mirrors the elements within Being Available. These elements include vision, knowing the person, having compassion, aesthetic knowing and poise. Creating and sustaining an environment where being available is possible, has been the most challenging aspect for me. This template, therefore, offers a framework to consider the

extent of my transformation towards self-realisation in my journey of being and becoming a reflective educator. In Chapter 2, I explored the six elements. (Figure 2.6,). Although each element may be addressed individually each can be seen as a pattern connecting each element in particular relating to the first five. Attention and detail differ, aiming to look from different vantage points as discussion flows. While it is important to identify a number of qualities, I am aware of the risk of reduction in theory building. I show my insights extending the template, without losing its essence. My vision of becoming student kind, as a reflective educator interweaves all qualities within the Being Available Template.

### **Realise a vision: becoming student kind as integral to person centred nursing**

Vision is at the heart of reflective practice (Johns 2006) and student kind. A way of being with students becomes the heart of my narrative, giving direction to my practice. I now understand student kind as ephemeral echoing back and forth, ever present, nurturing and sustaining self, showing caring and compassion through dialogue. One of the aims of the inquiry was to describe my personal vision as a nurse educator and this is now expressed in my goal

to be available to student nurses and colleagues

to enable a culture of student kind, congruent with the ideal of developing nurses, whereby I am available to each student, to help her or him to identify and meet their learning needs.

My vision of being available to student nurses within a particular type of enabling relationship, student kind, reciprocates and facilitates students becoming patient-kind. This enables students to be available in congruent ways with the people whom they interact namely patients, families and colleagues.

### **The practitioner knows the other**

Through empathy the practitioner appreciates the person's wholeness, tuning in, flowing with the person's experience. This quality was first intended for use within nurse patient relationships, requiring clarification, when considered for use in nurse education. I frame it using the questions:

To what extent do I need to know a student/person?

Does student kind require a different, more human approach to individual students?

As an educator, I am aware of boundaries while engaging with students. A relationship between student and teacher differs from that between nurse and patient. Being student kind is not a counselling relationship as defined within patient assessment processes. I move from seeking details, seen in an early reflection,<sup>240</sup>

MG: Oh your husband. What happened, you seem upset?

As the narrative continues, I shift, towards authenticity, paying attention, to the flow of a student's experience, listening with sensitivity, so that the other, the student can feel valued. I write in *Echoing voices*<sup>241</sup> that stories from a student world are,

about what is said, what is not said, suggestions implicit rather than the actual.

Reflections, reveal suffering that many students, mostly women experience in society; tales of violence, self-harm, ill health, loss, separation, isolation, bereavement. Students are no different and these challenges influence their abilities to engage in a demanding programme. I witness student distress, their struggle with a sense of failure, fears that ambitions to become a nurse will be dashed. O'Sullivan (2014)<sup>242</sup> exploring under-represented students' experiences,

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<sup>240</sup> *Emails that we (d) read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to*, Reflection 3

<sup>241</sup> Reflection 12

<sup>242</sup> M Res, colleague

reveals students showing determination, balancing work, study and life in becoming a nurse:

Freda<sup>243</sup> ... we want to get A's' and B's. ...I struggle balancing home and shifts. I had no money for the car NCT. I had to keep going. I had to...

Brona<sup>244</sup> ... I was on placement, pregnant, until Tuesday, I had my baby on Sunday. After three weeks, returned to labs and lectures... (O'Sullivan 2014, p. 68)

My narrative reveals how I became more attuned to students. Listening as stories unfold, suspending my assumptions, appreciating the meaning that an individual gives to their challenges. I may not have a deep knowing of the person, yet, of 'being with', inherent in what Rogers (1967) describes as 'empathic listening'. I write

I underestimated the importance of listening, allowing Mandy a chance to consider alternatives.<sup>245</sup>

Over time, change is seen when in *Spring of [Un]planned Pregnancy*<sup>246</sup> I ask '**Am I available?** Am I a listening presence?' Later in *Swallows set for home*,<sup>247</sup> I make reference to the interrelationship between deep listening and presence, drawing upon Senge *et al.* (2004). In the reflection *Back to earth*,<sup>248</sup> I further clarify my understanding, drawing upon the notion that listening, respecting, suspending and voicing, are four practices which are key to dialogue (Bohm 1996, p. 78). I now appreciate, that listening to students expressing emotions, can be cathartic for them. Thompson (2009, p. 167) proposes that catharsis can be valuable and a 'significant form of empowerment'. Being present without judgement is described by Elinor (2005) as 'choiceless awareness'. I interpret this as going with the flow as the story unfolds. Focusing on such awareness discriminates Bohm's dialogue from other forms of interaction. I move beyond feeling

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<sup>243</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>244</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>245</sup> *Emails that we(d) read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to*, Reflection 3

<sup>246</sup> Reflection 7

<sup>247</sup> Reflection 15

<sup>248</sup> Reflection 17

distressed with a sense of what Isaacs (1999, p. 98) calls 'disturbance.' In *Swallows set for home*<sup>249</sup> there is a glimpse of awareness of my becoming free of fear and conflict, writing,

Giving space

Giving time

Time to listen

To hear in the silence

To be present.

The key to knowing the person through empathic listening requires discipline (Freshwater 2003). I listen, therefore, to multi-layered stories from students perspectives. Understanding, that while I cannot change their circumstances, I can show concern, aware of my limitations.

I can be available, paying attention to the individuality of students, identified as a quality of an ideal teacher (Hughes and Quinn 2013). An aspirational challenge with growing class sizes, less contact, less engagement with tutorials within universities (Barnett and Coate 2005). My experience shows increasing tensions in learning in a curriculum, delivered as an ever expanding list of technical skills, raised in *Come to the edge*.<sup>250</sup> Such technical rationality differs from Barnett's (2005) belief that learning and change in human beings, has a 'time horizon' varying for different students, as they learn 'self-belief' and the ability to communicate, think and write' (p. 142). Barnett challenges the business model in higher education, advocating for a curriculum that engages students with learning spaces, where self can expand and flourish. This view has resonance with my story of facilitating sessions, beginning in *Holding the space*,<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Reflection 15

<sup>250</sup> Reflection 14

<sup>251</sup> Reflection 2

continuing through *Honour thy mother*,<sup>252</sup> *Come to the edge*<sup>253</sup> evidenced in student learning through feedback.

Significantly, supporting students to grow and develop calls for a different kind of relationship in the classroom. My vision is in keeping with a humanistic approach to teaching, informed by educationalist Freire (1990, p. 67) noting

through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers.

I envision student kind whereby each student is unique rather than a member of a homogenous depersonalised group. A relationship between student and teacher is not necessarily lengthy and may be brief or as seen with Mandy<sup>254</sup> and May,<sup>255</sup> Celine,<sup>256</sup> and Anna<sup>257</sup> takes place over many months. Knowing the student is about connection. Noddings (1984) claims caring must be 'enacted' for it to be experienced and learned. Such aspirational ideals are challenging in the current university culture, which mirrors the stresses of global recession (Deer 2003).

Maintaining equilibrium in knowing the student as a quality in being available is intertwined through mindful presence, poise, balancing ethical positions managing self as student distress surfaces explored in the third quality.

### **The practitioner is concerned for the other, has compassion**

Concern for another, to be moved by another's experiences is a fundamental human endeavour. My understanding of compassion clarifies my ability as an educator to be available, supporting students to be self-caring and compassionate nurses. Insights show the interrelationship between emotional

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<sup>252</sup> Reflection 8

<sup>253</sup> Reflection 14

<sup>254</sup> *Emails that we dread to see & phone calls that we need to listen to*, Reflection 3

<sup>255</sup> *A week in the life [exploring being and becoming]*, Reflection 19

<sup>256</sup> *She should leave she is a disgrace*, Reflection 9

<sup>257</sup> *A helix*, Reflection 18

distress, the influence of maternalism, co-dependency, as disempowering approaches to compassion, hindering being student kind. In *She should leave she is a disgrace*,<sup>258</sup> I ask, 'Am I maternal?' [in relationship with students] a recurring question through the narratives (*Honour thy mother, Echoing voices, Back to Earth*).<sup>259</sup> I next consider the interrelating elements; emotional distress, co-dependency and compassion.

### *Emotional distress*

My understanding of caring as concern for the other is influenced by Mayeroff's (1971) text on caring. Caring for another, demands a selflessness whereby the focus is on the other and according to Mayeroff (1971, p. 39) demands a 'heightened awareness and responsiveness'. I began with being kind to students, trying to sort problems, distressed at witnessing student distress. Anxiety paralysed me. I reacted to the emotional distress of students with a sense of helplessness, hindering my ability to be available.<sup>260</sup> Early writing reveals a struggle in opening the door to self. I was not in the world of mindfulness, influenced by the culture of my nurse education and training which as a female led me to adopting a maternal stance. I tried to sort things out, taking on a burden which was not my burden. In *Emails we dread to see*,<sup>261</sup> listening and acting on behalf of Mandy writing:

MG: I am sorry to hear that.

I was worried when seeing students tears, rushed to refer her to the counselling department'.

And despite my dismay utter: is there anything, I can help with? Then I contact the course director regarding an 'I grade application'.

Later in *Money matters, Erica's story*,<sup>262</sup> commenting

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<sup>258</sup> Reflection 9

<sup>259</sup> Reflection 8, Reflection 12, Reflection 17

<sup>260</sup> Emails that we(d) read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to..., Reflection 3

<sup>261</sup> Ibid

<sup>262</sup> Reflection 13

While I have made progress I still revert to a maternal approach when suggesting 'I could mail you to see how things are going.

Through guidance I moved from being fearful of emotions to accepting the outpouring of emotion.<sup>263</sup> A path to insight unfolds, hearing CJ's probe 'what's wrong with tears?'<sup>264</sup> I reacted to events, instead of responding, drained of energy, caught up in the turmoil of the other. This contrasts with what Omdahl and O'Donnell (1999) found, that being concerned in a responsive way, where a person does not take on the emotion of another is a healthy empathy that does not lead to burnout. This interpretation differs from 'emotional contagion' whereby I take on the emotion of another. Understanding of empathy is seen as I respond with compassion in a meaningful way with students in the midst of their struggles. Realising that emotion clouds my ability to be student kind, now pay attention to the influence of feelings on my perceptions. As Johns (2010) notes, thinking and writing about feelings is 'cathartic'. This view differs from that of Boud *et al.* (1985) whereby reflective thinking acknowledges emotions, but emphasis is based on rational thinking. I suggest that Boud's approach oversimplifies the individuality of human perception as clarified by Johns (2010, p. 37) in the following

the issue, is not so much removing them [feelings] but accepting them as valid and harnessing this energy for taking positive action.

My early interactions demonstrate my failure to enable students to make individual choices and grow through their own experiences. I mistakenly saw protection as caring. I now understand Mayeroff's (1971, p. 49) words

If the primary concern is to mold the child into what he thinks the child ought to be, or if he is more interested in having the child remain fundamentally dependent on him than the child becoming independent and self-determining. He does not care.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid

<sup>264</sup> Reflective community conversation September 2008



I realise that my intentions were misguided, disempowering, and may have led to a student feeling indebted to me or generate a dependency relationship.

### *Co-dependency*

The literature on co-dependency refers to acting as 'rescuer and fixer'. For Springer *et al.* (1998) co-dependency describes an individual's submersion in relationships at the cost of his or her own personal and psychological needs. In their research with college students they suggest that co-dependency is

an attempt to control the emotions of a significant other, a co-dependent might continually cater to the needs of the other person, believing that person will be obligated to give the co-dependent the love that he or she wants (Springer *et al.* 1998, p. 149).

An awareness of the possible destructive nature of co-dependency clarifies my understanding of being student kind. Over time, insight comes to the fore, when listening to May's story seeking refuge at a women's shelter (*A week in the life of*).<sup>265</sup> Aware of May's distress, I integrate a student kind approach, being present, listening with empathy and compassion, being respectful. Basic tenets for dialogue (Isaacs 1999, p. 117).

Moving from being kind to becoming student kind is significant in my journey. I appreciate that being student kind differs from taking over students' personal responsibility, disempowering students. Becoming student kind, therefore, is a fundamental shift in power relationships aiming to assist students to take responsibility for personal development. However, this idea is fraught with difficulty if students see themselves as 'subordinate', taking a passive role as learners (Freshwater 2000). Students taking a passive role to learning, does not seem a foundation for practice in a world where registration bodies, demand students to demonstrate 'the development of skills of analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving and reflective practice' (An Bord Altranais 2005, p. 12). Lofty

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<sup>265</sup> Reflection 19

aspirations in a curriculum, that seems to be reactive rather than responsive to government demands. The balance between safety, technical, artistry and compassion is continuous, illustrated in *Honour thy mother*,<sup>266</sup> *Come to the edge*.<sup>267</sup> This is revisited in *A week in the life*,<sup>268</sup> writing

the question remains as to the possibility of these students developing critical thinking abilities in a curriculum that is fast becoming knowledge banking.

The dilemma continues as NMBI<sup>269</sup> (2014 p. 10) circulate a review of programme requirements,<sup>270</sup> proposing similar outcomes quoted in above: requirement, specifying that students are enabled to 'deliver safe, compassionate, professional, ethical, legal and accountable practice...' (NMBI 2014, p. 10).

### *Compassion*

To become compassionate Mayeroff (1971, p. 13) suggests, helping another person to grow involves

encouraging and assisting him to find and create areas of his own in which he is able to care.

For nursing students this is about empowering themselves in becoming compassionate practitioners. However, whether this is ever possible within the culture of nurse education is another question? An Irish study by McNamara (2010) reports that nurse educators identify a 'content saturated' curriculum where 'every medical condition is still there.' (p. 254). Again, the emphasis is on technical knowledge rather than personal and professional development despite numerous research reports identifying nursing as emotional demanding. Seminal work by Menzies Lyth (1960) reported that the social systems in nursing

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<sup>266</sup> Reflection 8

<sup>267</sup> Reflection 14

<sup>268</sup> Reflection 19

<sup>269</sup> An Bord Altranais renamed as new legislation is enacted.

<sup>270</sup> Draft requirements and standards 4<sup>th</sup> edition 30/3/ 2014

organisations were linked to failure to deal with the anxiety of nursing. The nurses in Menzies Lyth's study reported high levels of stress resulting from the responsibility in caring and the realities and emotions in dealing with suffering and death. Menzies Lyth argued that the closer the nurse patient relationship, the more likely the impact of anxiety, reporting a lack of strategies to

positively help the individual confront the anxiety-evoking experiences and by so doing to develop her capacity to tolerate and deal more effectively with the anxiety (Menzies Lyth 1988, p. 63).

Similarly, a Royal College of Nursing (2013) survey of 2000 nurses *Beyond Breaking Point?* portrays a struggling workforce, pressurised workspace, high workloads and long hours with nurses feeling unsupported. This study recommends employers provide support for nurses, giving due recognition to the impact of 'emotional work on nurses wellbeing' (p. 7-9). Again, the question is raised, how are students supported to learn in a system that asks nurses 'to do more with fewer resources ... reduced staffing levels?' (Royal College of Nursing 2013, p. 3).

Against this practice background, reflecting on how I as an educator facilitate student learning about self and self-care is essential. Consideration is valuable given the interrelationship between students as individuals, as students of nursing and ultimately person centred nurses. A view underpinned by being available to student nurses is a particular enabling relationship, framed as student kind, which in turn aims to reciprocate and facilitate students becoming patient kind. Mayeroff (1971) illuminates his understanding of caring, which is in keeping with the embedded nature of being a reflective nurse educator, commenting that

I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but helping the other grow I do actualize myself. My dependency on the other is bound up with respecting and furthering its integrity, which is very different from a parasitic relationship in which I possess the other and am unable to experience it as existing in its own right (Mayeroff 1971, p. 40).

Therefore, developing a relational view of compassionate care within nursing is possible, and is more than an aspiration. Findings by Dewar *et al.* (2014, p. 7) describe compassion as 'skilled interpersonal and relational', identifying that practitioners can be supported to embed these skills, recommending that educational programmes need to consider how best to develop these skills. Nonetheless, no mention is given to surmounting challenges in delivering programmes educating students to be available as compassionate, person centred nurses.

In essence, I respond with compassion to individual students, showing acceptance (*She should leave she is a disgrace, Money Matters Erica's story, A Week in the Life of*).<sup>271</sup> I suspend judgement, at the same time separating my own need from those of others. This is a stepping stone from emotional entanglement, freeing me to think clearly as situations unfold with emotional intelligence. Each quality in being available is integral to concern for the other present, composed but not emotionally attached. These qualities are revealed and clarified through guided reflection, fostered through an increasing mindfulness to my approach to work situations.

### **Meeting the person's needs – the aesthetic response**

This quality can be viewed from the perspective of dilemmas, knowing how to act for the best in situations, demonstrating authenticity and caring. This means managing an advocacy-enablement tension (Johns 2013) against a back drop of student teacher power relationships, fostering student decision making, and reviewing the efficacy of relationships within a nurse educator role. Faced with a dilemma of how best to respond, fundamental questions guide my choices.

Are my actions in tune with my vision of student kind?

Do I have the skills; do I need to improve them?

How do I judge efficacy?

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<sup>271</sup>Reflection 9, Reflection 13, Reflection 19

These questions are explored across overarching power in student-teacher relationships and efficacy. I have learned to manage subjectivity within unfolding situations, informed by literature, illustrated in *A week in the life of*.<sup>272</sup> This reflection shows Anna, struggling to fulfil her dreams and my concerns about Anna's wellbeing and competence.<sup>273</sup> Returning to reflection, a journal excerpt illustrates my transformation

Anna: It has been going on for long time...

I am broke I want to leave this town I want a fresh start

I needed to work on what happened before

I thought I was coming today to be told the decision had been made for me

I wished a decision had been made for me

MG: It's hard for you

Anna: I knew deep down, that you would do what you always do, leave it to me.

MG: You know what's best for you

Anna: It has to be me, I want to move on,

MG: It's been going on for long time

Anna: I'm broke, I want to leave, I want a fresh start

I needed time to work things out in my head

I loved the course

I dreamt about being a nurse ...

I have to look after my health. I don't think that I could handle that crazy world of placement, I am too sensitive.

MG: You've made your decision

Yea

MG: taking a general degree and finish <sup>274</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Reflection 19

<sup>273</sup> Ibid Discussions with occupational health, leave, phased return to practice

<sup>274</sup> The department has led the development of an exit award whereby students who cannot complete the registration requirement of the programme can utilise their educational credits towards diploma or general degree level.

Yea, I am going to get a job, dreams don't pay rent

I am ready .....

Aware of Anna's distress, I review my response, listening presence, paraphrasing, desisting from giving direction, responding in adult to adult conversation, becoming student kind. At the same time, aware of my duty of care towards patients and the health service, my responsibilities as an employee, and power within student-teacher relationships.

#### Power in student teacher relationships

Burnard (1990) writes of the importance of how power is distributed in nurse education. As Gaines and Baldwin (1996, p. 124) describe nurse educational systems as 'fostering a relationship of dominance and subservience between teachers and students'.

Influenced by the emancipatory writings of Freire, Bevis and Watson (1989) suggest, that such authoritarian approaches which are 'politically oppressive' objectify student learning, conflicting with caring as a belief central to curriculum. Promoting egalitarian teacher student [adult to adult] relationships fosters teacher and student growth enabling students' abilities to take ethical positions with clients. For such a transformation to occur in nurse education, Gaines and Baldwin (1996) argue for a shift from a maternal gaze towards a connected partnership based on trust. I suggest that becoming student kind is one possibility. However Brown (1993) argues that such a relationship involves a cultural shift, requiring dialogue around all aspects of nurse education. As Gaines and Baldwin (1996, p. 124) suggest, 'dismantling the power structure in relationship'. This raises questions, about curriculum delivery, student engagement in learning pedagogies in supporting emancipatory ideologies. The university at which I work has described engaged learning as a leitmotif

When students are actively and deeply involved in their education they have a better educational experience.<sup>275</sup>

However, the document acknowledges the process of realising such a vision is not simple without a single solution. Challenging ideas, in challenging times in university systems described as 'being in ruins' (Rolfe 2013).

I return to my journey, beginning with individual student interactions, encouraging students to lead self, moving from a parent-child relationship with a student towards an adult-adult relationship. Significantly, shifting in responsibility and power, away from kindness, towards being student kind is part of the advocacy-enablement tension. My position is informed by Egan (2014) in *The Skilled Helper*, claiming dependency and oppression is the opposite of empowerment. Egan expands, suggesting that

helpers assist clients to discover, develop and use resources to that will make them more effective agents of change (Egan 2014, p. 58).

Socialisation influences an ability to respond with ethical sensitivity and judgement. Scott (2000, p. 124) suggests that organizational structures in nursing 'dull our ability to be sensitive to the moral dimensions'. Scott draws upon Aristotle writing

by looking one comes to see. By practising good habits one comes to feel and act in a morally virtuous way (Scott 2000, p. 129).

### Efficacy

Through guided reflection I have learned about doing the right thing, rather than doing things right, in the context of a situation. This is a significant marker in my journey. An aesthetic response integrates beliefs, emotion and intuition in the midst of unfolding experience. This insight is seen in *Tide turns towards*

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<sup>275</sup> Engaged learning, Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy 2014-18, 19/9/2014.

*transformation*,<sup>276</sup> I exercise clinical judgment. I am available, paradoxically advocating for a student, while at the same time, reporting disciplinary concerns to senior authorities. Throughout, the process I engage with a student, collaborate with authorities, advocating for the student. This is an approach differing from the influences of a culture of maternalism. Traditionally, the educator takes control referring decision making to another authority. Jourard (1971) writes that control used in this way, does not provide opportunities for increasing self-awareness, critical to Mayeroff's (1971) view of growth and development.

Being mindful of the influence of maternalism, I now take action with equanimity, informed by the work of Fay (1987).<sup>277</sup> This transition is seen in *She should leave she is a disgrace*.<sup>278</sup> Writing how first I saw 'she' as an object, as a problem adding to my stress. Eventually, while dwelling with my vision, she became a person describing a burden of shame. I begin hearing the student. Celine describes a sense of isolation and secrecy surrounding the possibility of expulsion from the programme. Through reflection I have become aware of emotional entanglement within ethical reasoning when reporting and dealing with disciplinary issues. I listen, aware of the challenges facing Celine, without anxiety with freedom to make decisions without compromising my beliefs.

My report to the disciplinary committee identifies Celine's acknowledgement of her error, appreciating the consequences of her actions, remorseful with evidence of learning through the process of disciplinary procedures. Several meetings were held with the authorities; union representatives and Health Service and university management. For the first time I am able to see myself differently, my vision of student kind gaining momentum. I manage myself, whereby previously I would have been stressed.

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<sup>276</sup> Reflection 11

<sup>277</sup> Fay (1987) explained tradition force and embodiment as barriers to rational change

<sup>278</sup> Reflection 9



My suggestion that Celine write a reflection demonstrating learning was endorsed by the authorities as part of a disciplinary process.<sup>279</sup> My approach to Celine's situation has informed the outcome of other disciplinary procedures. There are ripples of possibilities, and the benefits of reflection as a learning pedagogy have begun in the department. The experience with Celine highlights my ability to act in tune with my values, being mindful, balancing continual tensions between professional responsibilities while concerned for students as people. This is described in *The tide turns toward transformation*.<sup>280</sup> In *Back to earth*<sup>281</sup> I write of being with May in student kind dialogue

I become aware of the unfolding moment as my past reflections inform my present...

What can I do...

I choose to listen with empathy.

To talk together without agenda

To listen to the other

Respect, empathy, care, receptivity and solicitude

To understand the experience of the other

Intentionality

Reciprocity.<sup>282</sup>

I move from deferring to authority, overwhelmed with emotion to integrating my insights, finding a dialogical voice recommending the student graduate. I manage tensions in exercising my judgement, being student kind, at the same time, aware of responsibilities in a Code of Conduct<sup>283</sup> and as a university employee. I challenge the social norms, where I accept the authority of another.

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<sup>279</sup> The paper demonstrated personal and professional learning through guided reflection, facilitated by a colleague.

<sup>280</sup> Reflection 11

<sup>281</sup> Reflection 17

<sup>282</sup> Drawing on Bohm (1996), Cayer (2005, p. 175)

<sup>283</sup> An Bord Altranais (2000)

Small steps moving from an old regime towards becoming student kind. At the same time I appreciate that the university is a relative newcomer<sup>284</sup> in resolving disciplinary practice fitness issues for health care disciplines.

Sometimes, things don't always work out in a neat manner, evidenced towards the end of my narrative in *A Helix*<sup>285</sup> I write 'about holding my vision for student kind in the palm of my hand' in conversation with Anna struggling with mental health difficulties

Anna: I'm not ready to go back [placement]

Anna tells of being tired, sleeping a lot, no energy. The conversation continues.....

Anna: I think I'll return to occupational health services for referral back to the mental health services.

Here, in dialogue, Anna leads herself, working through her choices, taking care of her own health. I resist taking on the 'fix it' maternal role.

Being available in this way is in keeping with the belief of Mayeroff (1971) that in helping an individual to grow into being an independent person, one must allow her to make her own decisions. Over time, I listen with Mandy, Anna, May, Erica, and Celine witnessing their struggles, their resilience, appreciating the complexity of student lives. However I question, is it enough to be student kind with individual students on individual occasions? Mere ripples in a sea change. Okri (1997, p. 97) offers wisdom

The beautiful thing about even the most superficial attempt to collide with the secret lives of others is ...the aesthetic of serendipity: the accidental discoveries, the widening horizons, roads opened by lightening into the forests of reality.

My intention in being available enables students to identify their own learning needs. In turn, this may inform the discussions about how students themselves

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<sup>284</sup> BSc Nursing, commenced 2002, first programme with registration requirements.

<sup>285</sup> Reflection 18

develop caring in practice and ultimately consider being and becoming patient kind. A student can be given space to develop, to become a truly person centred nurse available in congruent ways with patients, families and colleagues.

I handle ethical dilemmas in a more balanced way, visualising the diagram of Cope (2006, p. 21), Figure 3.1.

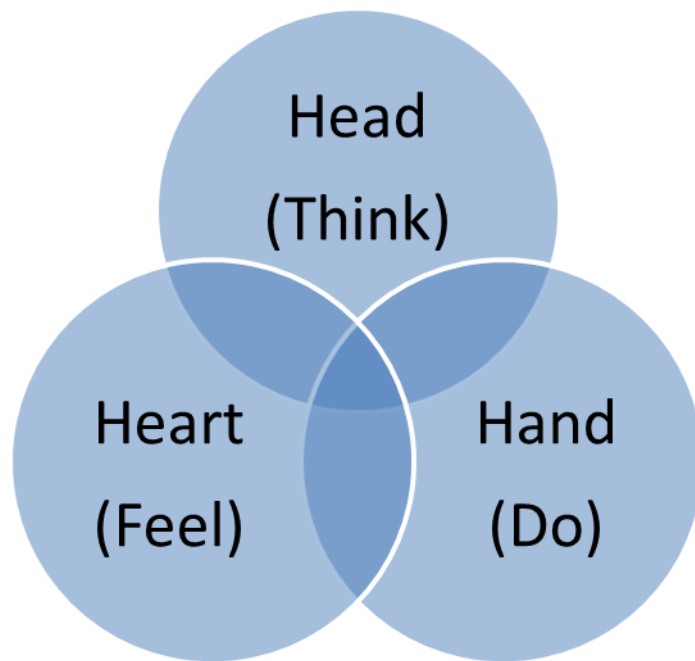


Figure 3.1, Diagram head heart hand (Cope 2006)

I write,

Somehow this is calming, enabling me to be aware of the dimensions to this situation and to strive to be present, 'to push the pause button.' I choose my response in tune with my values of being student kind. I listen.<sup>286</sup>

Through reflection, a developing mindfulness reduces my fear of conflict and deferring to authority. I adapt Cope's diagram into a Celtic spiral<sup>287</sup> focusing on a fluid, never ending circle, Figure 4.3.

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<sup>286</sup>Money matters, Erica's story, Reflection 15

<sup>287</sup>Triple centred



Figure 4.3, Head, heart, hand, a celtic adaptation.

To summarise, the aesthetic response is integral to the qualities in being available. I do not offer solutions to dilemmas, aware of my shifting view of student teacher relations. My intention differs from traditional relationships whereby a nurse teacher takes a parental role seeing the student as child. I now understand that being maternal is not constructive. I aim for an adult-adult relationship fostering personal and professional development and independence. I am more aware of the consequences and tensions in my intentions and actions. Emerging insights show the beginning of practical wisdom in managing these tensions sustained through poise.

### **Poise**

So far, being student kind embraces an appreciation of the meaning a person gives to experience, and is tightly knotted within all qualities. Poise is expressed by Johns (2009) as emotional intelligence and self-care. Aware that being compassionate has a 'flip side' an increased vulnerability, understanding the nature of this paradox, is a significant empowering practice for me. I explore the interweaving elements of emotional intelligence, self-care and empowering practices.

## Emotional intelligence

The ability to manage self and our relationships effectively is inherent in being available. How we recognise and understand how we think feel and act shapes our interactions (Goleman 1998). Attributes inherent in the concept of emotional intelligence are described as self-awareness, self-management, empathy and social skill (Goleman 1998).<sup>288</sup> These attributes can contribute to understanding, managing emotions in positive ways, minimising response to stress, overcoming challenges, handling conflict, developing resilience - useful qualities for a role in higher education.<sup>289</sup> Howe (2013) from a counselling perspective suggests that emotional intelligence and empathy interlink and are relevant in educating nurses, noting

the more we recognise and understand empathy in all its guises the more likely it will be that our communications will be alert...our practices effective and our behaviour decent our societies civilised... Activity that encourages us to get inside the head of another helps us to see the world from some else's point of view emotional literacy is therefore every bit as important as technical competence (Howe 2013, pps. 185-204).

## Self-care

Mindful of O' Donohue's (1997, p. 28) words

you lose the balance of your soul if you do not learn to take care of yourself.

I use nature to generate self-caring practice (*Tide turns towards transformation; Swallows set for home*).<sup>290</sup> Thus being available in empathetic relationships with students as expressed in student kind, requires self-caring practice. Significantly, learning 'that personal concerns do not interfere with being available to the person' (Johns 2013, p. 67). Concern has been described by Johns (2010, p. 217) as a 'motivational expression of caring'. Now, I see students as individuals, entering dialogue with emotional equanimity.

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<sup>288</sup> Goleman D (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, Bantam Books

<sup>289</sup> blog [www.danielgoleman.info/](http://www.danielgoleman.info/) [Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> January 2014]

<sup>290</sup> Reflection 11, Reflection 15

At the same time being student kind requires a different kind of relationship than that between nurse and patient. Rules are less clear and the relationship may see teachers feeling increasingly vulnerable. I now appreciate, subtleties within such a compassionate relationship, moving from being fearful of my inability to know, what to and how to be with students in distress, learning to remain calm and poised.

Earlier experiences negatively impacted on energy, limiting connection with student suffering. In *Spring of [un]planned pregnancy*,<sup>291</sup> writing of a student's overwhelming mixed emotion around pregnancy, fearful about the possibility of continuing on the programme. I pay attention, becoming aware of the significance of listening rather than rescuing, commenting

Where is this new mother to be?

Worrying about this new burden

Sharing her innermost secret

Where am I, where am I

**Am I available?**

Am I a listening presence?

Are we available?

Is this what education is about

Is this what adult learning is about?

Listening as she worked through her choices. Hidden fear for me bubbles to the surface. As I worried '**What if....** '

Heeding Freshwater's (2003) advice, I have become informed about resources and services for students, within and outside the organisation. Instead of worrying about the 'worst', I began to learn about distressed students at workshops hosted by the counselling service, aware, however, of a fine balance

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<sup>291</sup> Reflection 7

between using counselling skills and being student kind. I recognise my own limitations, in crossing boundaries of a counselling relationship.

Being poised enables me to be student kind connecting with students. Gillespie (2005) too describes connection as integral to knowing, trust and respect - cornerstones to supporting students at risk. Guidance helps me avoid what O'Donohue (1997, p. 224) describes as 'woundology... going back to the wound and open it up again' adding that

we need to treat ourselves with tenderness. Part of the wisdom of spiritual soulful self-presence is to be able to let certain aspects of your life alone...the art of spiritual non-interference.

I intended to be helpful, to do no harm, now appreciating my fears and anxieties are a legacy from the historical, religious and societal influences within nursing, termed 'maternalism.' A view in keeping with Wilson Barnett's (1986) assertion that maternalism is part of a heritage of nursing a female dominated profession. By inference this can translate to traditional student nurse teacher relationships.

#### Empowering practice

Being responsive to the stress of another based on being poised is an empowering practice that has been closely described within emotional intelligence. My understanding has gradually shifted, from kindness to identifying an over-arching thread of student kind, being in the moment connecting with students (Gillespie 2005). I am informed by Senge *et al.* (2004) ideas about presence as a heightened awareness, slowing down thinking

opening of space to take care of the other... Solidarity, compassion, care, love, all the different modes of being together-appear when the self is decentred (Senge *et al.* 2004, p. 101-102).

Poise is not about detachment and attachment; instead it is about flowing and reconnecting rather than distancing self from caring (Benner and Wrubel, 1989). Paradoxically, knowing for me in this way has lessened my stress. Balancing

attachment and detachment has been found to be a valuable feature of learning through reflection (Rees 2013). Managing and appreciating the emotional challenges of nursing has potential in providing a foundation for holistic nursing care (Ironsides *et al.* 2005). Reflective activities are reported by Rees (2013) as helpful for final year students, in managing the emotional challenges of nursing. Though no mention is given of how these students learn

to provide authentic and embodied care within the context of themselves in that care (Rees 2013, p. 50).

Whereas, guidance fosters learning to balance the tension between wanting to do things in a better way and the reality of practice (Johns 2010). Learning to hold creative tension with poise has been insightful.

Again, there is little mention of how attributes beyond cognitive skill are learned. Emotional intelligence is a subtle attribute that can be expressed as poise. Johns (2009) suggests that to be poised is to be patient, an idea that resonates for me with a familiar verse from the bible

love is patient and kind;’...  
love never gives up... and its faith, hope and patience never fail.<sup>292</sup>

The quote, illustrates for me, the relationship between patience, as an expression of poise, integral to being student kind. Through being available, a pattern is revealed in my narrative, integrating mind, body and spirit, drawing upon my spirituality, using nature, in daily life, being mindful all interweaving supporting my way of leading and taking care of self, flowing towards the other towards empowerment.

### **Creates and sustaining a learning environment**

Finally, the sixth quality is perplexing, yet, central to personal knowing and transformation, critical to self-inquiry. It explores creating an educational

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<sup>292</sup> St Pauls first letter to Corinthians 1;13:4-7, The Good News Bible 1979, Reading used at family ceremonies



environment, through reflection where I can be available to work with students. Through this process I come to appreciate the factors that influence and constrain me in working towards resolving the tension between my ideal vision of student kind and lived reality. In clarifying this challenge Johns (2013, p. 67) identifies interconnected factors

Creating and maintaining collaborative and assertive patterns in relationships with colleagues towards realising a shared vision of practice

Being political to maximise available resources to ensure availability to the student and counter coercive patterns of management

Collaborative attitude and skill to manage conflict (Thomas and Kilman conflict mode instrument)

Having a constructed voice (Belenky *et al.* 1996) that is influential (Johns 2013, p. 67).

#### Ripples of change

I begin with some small ripples, where I take freedom to explore and establish roles within the department, profoundly influenced by my journey. New knowledge from my narrative sustains my commitment, using my sense of mindfulness as a resource, collaborating and leading reflective practice with students, with colleagues, within practice collaboration, student representative forums and student experience. Insights guide my approaches, informed by an understanding of a dialogical voice, as a significant insight echoing across the narrative. I begin with developments which I lead namely reflection.

#### Reflective practice with students

Leading Protected Reflective Time (PRT) Module<sup>293</sup> is a foreground to learning about the benefits, possibilities and challenges in striving to develop a curriculum grounded in reflection. My knowing sustains a commitment to guided reflection through collaborating with colleagues and stakeholders, establishing frameworks, maximising resources and structures for over 100 students every

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<sup>293</sup> Protected Reflective Time (Appendix 1)

year.<sup>294</sup> Approaches are based on a commitment to a shared vision. Additionally I work with students individually, facilitating reflection.<sup>295</sup> Such students may be vulnerable with delayed or repeat placements, often angry or upset as described in my interaction with Nora (*Swallows set for home*).<sup>296</sup>

The framework for organising and facilitating PRT,<sup>297</sup> is resource intensive. Turner and Beddoes (2007, p. 136) note that facilitating reflection is ‘time consuming with few institutional rewards’. While undoubtedly higher education is interested in advancing knowledge and developing staff, there are contradictions (Rolfe 2012). Political forces and an economic downturn sees university management concentrate on generating research funding outputs with increasing attention to economic costing,<sup>298</sup> and workload measurement (Ross *et al.* 2013). Pressure to advance scholarship in nursing, newly integrated<sup>299</sup> into academia is no different from other departments (McVeigh *et al.* 2002). There are additional challenges, nurse leaders in universities are reported as managing ‘a foot in both camps’ as a tension grows between academic and practice roles (Ross *et al.* 2013). Although, Ross *et al.* (2013) acknowledge that the study is a snap shot,<sup>300</sup> they recommend debate around the positioning of nurse education, and the value institutions place on nursing, with attention to leadership to promote education and practice.

I dialogue, sharing ideas, aware that PRT innovations might be seen as a personal crusade rather than a sustainable approach to learning. Bulman *et al.* (2013)

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<sup>294</sup>Evaluations show positive feedback submitted in the annual report to LJWG and the NMBI  
Appendix 1

<sup>295</sup>Students who may have had illness or be on repeat placement where timing and structures fall outside normal arrangements

<sup>296</sup>Reflection 15

<sup>297</sup>Annual feedback is presented to our LJWG Local joint working group representing stakeholders across the region, NMBI report (Appendix 1).

<sup>298</sup>Higher Education Authority: Government organisation with responsibility for overseeing higher education in Ireland

<sup>299</sup>Government of Ireland (2002) Forum on nurse education led to an integration of nurse teachers with MSc level education into higher education 2002

<sup>300</sup>Interviews with 10 faculty members across the UK.

claim that reflective learning strategies will only flourish if attention is paid to the skills of facilitation. In this way, facilitators model personal reflective skills, an essential prerequisite, for understanding of reflection (Bulman *et al.* 2012, p. 13). However, why would educators want to commit to enhancing skills in guiding reflection? Without doubt there is commitment that needs to be seen in the context of pressurised work environments. I work in collaboration with colleagues, maintaining relationships against a background of tensions between efficiency and survivorship with diminishing resources. Therefore, further dialogue is needed if reflection is to become more than a 'slogan' (Brooker and O'Donoghue (1993). I acknowledge that my approaches to PRT are individual, offering possibilities and benefits in reflective learning, far from Johns (2013) vision of a reflective curriculum. Johns vision requires a revolution at regional and national level. I take a 'velvet glove' approach (*Finding my voice, Tide turns towards transformation*)<sup>301</sup>.

I go forward cautiously, aware of the possibility of 'cultural suicide' of becoming a critically reflective teacher 'whose raison d'être seems to be to make life as difficult and as uncomfortable as possible' (Brookfield 1995, p. 235). I cannot say that I work in a hostile culture, but there are changes. My insights have led to me being forewarned. I am working to avoid such pitfalls following the caution of Freire and Brookfield (1995, p. 246) that 'acting alone is the best way to commit suicide'. I seek support through conversations in a community of like-minded colleagues, friends, talking things through in a safe environment. I engage in a reflective community, write a prose poem *Captain of my destiny* (Appendix 7). These all help to 'dust myself off', pick myself up, developing inner resilience.

There are more ripples. When invited to prepare a position paper on reflection for the Irish NMBI, as part of national curriculum review of nursing and midwifery I see an opening for dialogue, sharing a vision of nurse education

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<sup>301</sup>Reflection 10, Reflection 11

embedded in reflection. Being political requires me to seize such opportunities. The issue is maximising available resources while aiming to support the availability of reflective learning structures for students, seeking to collaborate with qualified colleagues at regional level.

I see potential to advance a small shift towards a reflexive methodology informed by my insights, with the forthcoming development of a practice inquiry strand involving reflection at the MSc dissertation level. I am working with two colleagues to progress this option. There are hurdles but there are possibilities too.

#### Reflective practice collaboration

I extend my work with students, responding to calls from health services colleagues<sup>302</sup> to support development of a 'reflective culture in the organisation',<sup>303</sup> facilitating seminars<sup>304</sup> on guided reflection with Clinical Placement Coordinators,<sup>305</sup> receiving positive feedback. Further collaboration aims to develop guided reflective practice groups with ward managers across services.

My first story *Tabhair dom do lámh*,<sup>306</sup> led to collaboration with a colleague and practice, developing a DVD on hand massage to support carers of people with dementia. The DVD has been used with community groups in the *Life Long Learning Festival*, described in *A week in the life of*.<sup>307</sup> Multiple DVD's have been circulated,<sup>308</sup> with possibilities for future collaboration interweaving practice and research through a thread of reflection. An MSc research scholarship has been

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<sup>302</sup> Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Education

<sup>303</sup> In response to An Bord Altranais site visit report 2011

<sup>304</sup> September, 2013, 2014

<sup>305</sup> CPC role in providing support for students in clinical placement

<sup>306</sup> Reflection 1

<sup>307</sup> Reflection 19

<sup>308</sup> On line web link shows activity and requests across the region and internationally

awarded; exploring nurses' experiences of using touch in alleviating anxiety for individuals with dementia.<sup>309</sup>

#### Facilitating student representative forum

Chairing the student representative forum,<sup>310</sup> provides opportunities for dialogical voice, aiming for openness where my beliefs are congruent with my actions, rather than traditional meeting rituals<sup>311</sup> as described in reflections. There were rumblings that this forum would be dissolved. I asked what is the alternative? We keep going. I bring awareness of tensions balancing my beliefs in creating a forum for student voice while acknowledging power relationships between me as a faculty representative and colleagues committed to developing the forum beyond token student involvement. Attentive to these power imbalances has gradually developed as an undercurrent through the narrative, appreciating relationships between students and teachers is never neutral. While there is no certainty, a student leader comments

The student forum is unique [in the university], works well to support students we get to talk; as acknowledged at a student union executive meeting.<sup>312</sup>

#### Student experience

I lead on student experience, agreeing a dialogical approach,<sup>313</sup> as the department aligns with university rhetoric and commitment in

providing an outstanding student experience.... Our commitment is to make a difference by shaping the future through educating and empowering our students.<sup>314</sup>

Possibilities, yet tensions ripple; is this tokenism? A poison chalice? I am optimistic as I don't sense tokenism, preferring to see dialogical voice. Keeping

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<sup>309</sup> Full fees are awarded for 2 years

<sup>310</sup> Working in collaboration with student representatives, student union, faculty, allocations and practice teams, detailed in Appendix 1

<sup>311</sup> *Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect* trust Reflection 5, *Helix* Reflection 18

<sup>312</sup> Autumn Semester November 2013 minutes

<sup>313</sup> Following discussion with Head of Department A decision is taken not to form a committee but to see the student experience lead as an overarching role

<sup>314</sup> Recruitment announcement 30/01/2013

the agenda flowing, as Greenleaf (2002, p. 41) in *The Servant as Leader* puts it, as 'a disturber and awakener' taking one step at a time. Heeding Okri (1997, p. 67) 'the difficult responsibility of speaking out and the necessity of silence'. I choose to be mindful; holding my vision, in dialogue along corridors, over coffee, twittering like swallows on the air.

## Voice

To the forefront of my transformation has been an interweaving development of assertive patterns of working with colleagues, pushing boundaries. This has been guided by vision embedded through the development of voice 'as a metaphor for empowerment' (Johns 2010, p. 297). The development of a constructed voice is the intent of guided reflection. I expand this idea, shaping the levels of voice as explicated by Belenky *et al.* (1986) revealing a dialogical voice (Figure 4.4).

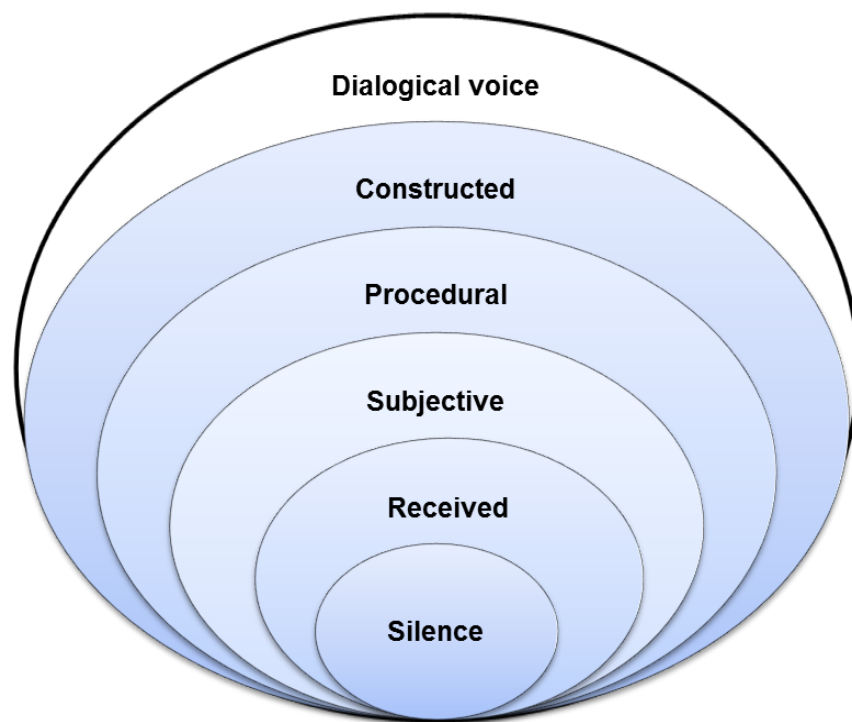


Figure 4.4, Development of dialogical voice

I frame being available within the wider organisational setting creating a dialogical voice seeking to create an environment where being available is possible, an ethical responsibility acting on insights (Figure 4.5). Belenky *et al.*

(1986) *A Women's Ways of Knowing* offers a way towards understanding how women develop an informed and assertive voice through a series of five levels, from silence to a constructed voice whereby,

women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and where subjective and objective knowledge has value (Belenky *et al.* 1986, p. 15).

I balance the tensions between the subjective voice of self, as human, with vulnerability and procedural voice, integrating a separate rational voice towards a constructed voice. A constructed voice is woven into what Johns (2013, p. 11) describes as 'informed, passionate and assertive'. Extending Belenky *et al.*'s (1986) dialogical voice as illustrated (Figure 4.5).

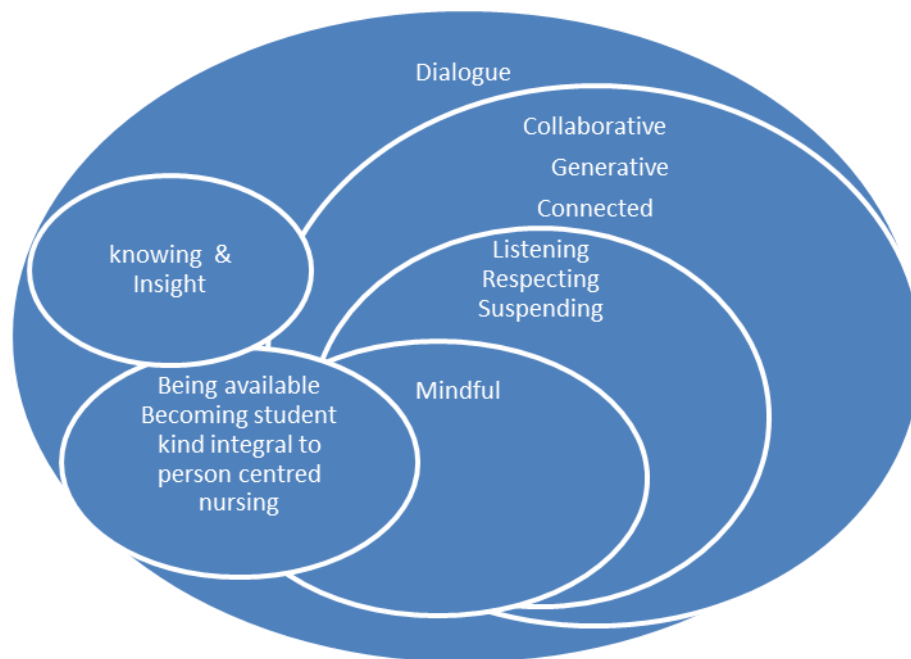


Figure 4.5, Dialogical voice

Integrating Bohm's (1996) practices<sup>315</sup> illuminates dialogical voice, moving from understanding the nature of the political reality of organisations to exploring how to resolve these tensions. Fay (1997) describes this as a voice, which is not always heard, accepting that things are the way things are. Through dialogue, I

<sup>315</sup> Listening, respecting, suspending and voicing Bohm (1996) p. 78

have learnt to manage tensions and conflict seen in *She should leave* and *Tide turns towards transformation*.<sup>316</sup> My voice echoes back and forth, implicit and explicit in responding to individual contexts across time and place. Belenky *et al.* (1986, p. 15) identify that silence is where women position themselves as 'mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority'. Words, describing my position at the outset, Chapter 1, *Setting Out*, deferring to the authority of others, receiving knowledge in a passive unquestioning form where inherent tensions are the focus of *Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust*.<sup>317</sup> I began by being reactive to situations. Reflections show how I now create space for mutual understanding, seeking to foster collaboration in dialogue in companioned silence.<sup>318</sup>

While Belenky *et al.* (1986) offer a valuable framework for discussion they nevertheless omit to explicate processes to develop ways of knowing. A counter point is the acknowledgment that their work was a search for knowledge, while my inquiry focuses towards being and becoming. For me, this is realised and understood through reflection as dialogue. I argue that my interpretation of Belenky *et al.* (1986) makes sense of my world, seen in *Swallows set for home*,<sup>319</sup> 'writing is so freeing, to be unravelled from emotional entanglement and fear of conflict'. In *A Helix*<sup>320</sup> I write of going to a meeting, prepared to listen in dialogue,

I practice the art of dialogue, where the visceral pain in *Holly*<sup>321</sup> is gone, now I go [to meetings] with openness without solutions or fixed ideas aiming to create a space to explore.

The shift from bleakness is seen in another excerpt from *Holly*,

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<sup>316</sup> Reflection 9; Reflection, 11

<sup>317</sup> Reflection 5

<sup>318</sup> Companioned silence differs from Belenky *et al.* (1986) description at a lesser level where women have nothing to say.

<sup>319</sup> Reflection 15

<sup>320</sup> Reflection 18

<sup>321</sup> Reflection 16



Raising questions

How can I see what is coming?

Do they see it differently?

Maybe we need to look at how we structure learning.

Significantly, progress shifts beyond individual transformation using my voice, to being available to students. Further ripples emerging through my narrative show how insights provide opportunities,<sup>322</sup> collaborating with six member group preparing a department strategy for 2020.

I have begun to know self, fundamental to considering a broader examination within nurse education. This is in keeping with research by Horton-Deutsch *et al.* (2010) with 23 faculty across the United States. They described self-exploration as a way for nursing faculty leaders to face the multiple challenges of academia, concluding that opportunities which

facilitate self-exploration, caring and thoughtful interactions with others and values clarification serve as the foundation for becoming a nurse faculty leader (Horton-Deutsch 2010, p. 487).

While different structures operate across different institutions. Horton-Deutsch *et al.*'s (2010) research is significant in discussing the potential benefits of reflective practice in becoming a leader. While, recommending reflection as a learning pedagogy, no reference is given to guidance, fundamental to Johns' conception of reflective practice. My reflexive narrative, therefore, illustrates an embedded approach to guided reflection as integral to self-discovery. Being self-aware [or being mindful], is in itself critical for taking responsibility and leading and taking action.

I have endeavoured to show transformation through ever evolving insights which Palmer (1993, p. xxiii) terms as 'wholesight', where heart and mind as two

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<sup>322</sup> Reflection for fourth year internship students, chairing the student forum

eyes make one in transforming self and practice. I turn to briefly explore a broader landscape of transformation.

## Broadening landscape

So far much of this chapter is devoted to an undercurrent of creating an environment where being available through the interrelated qualities becoming student kind becomes a possibility, showing a shift from a focus on the individual and classroom to becoming increasingly more political. Since, beginning the narrative, insights around self, and self in relationship with students and colleagues, is an ever evolving search for transformation. In doing so, I seek ways to work within the constraints which influence my practice. Transformation is an elusive quality, central to personal critical to self-inquiry. Boychuk Duchscher (2000) suggests that knowledge is useful only if it can lead to a 'broadening self-understanding'. Therefore, I turn to frame transformation informed by critical social science as theorised by Fay (1987) across three dimensions; enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation, and transformation as expanded by Johns (2010) as adapted in Figure 4. 6.

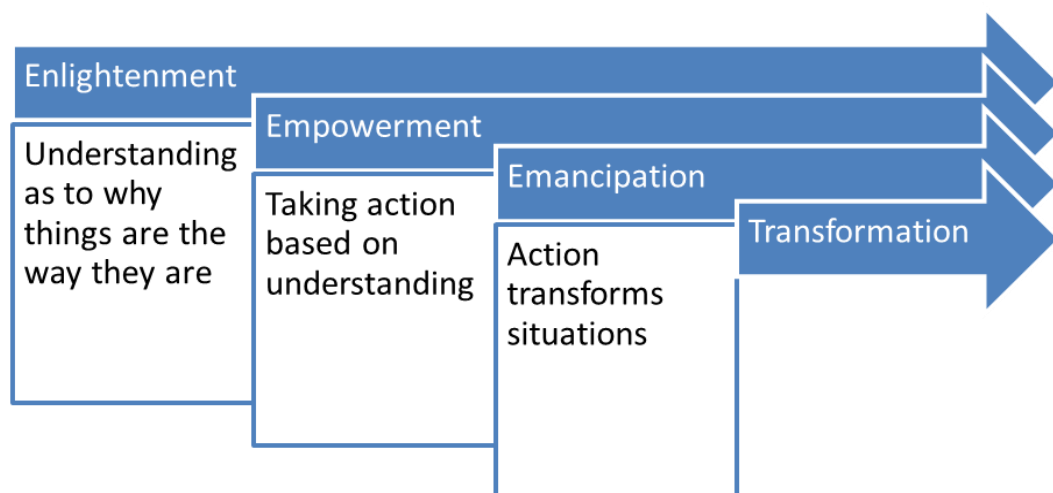


Figure 4.6, Transformation adapted from (Johns (2010)

## Enlightenment

Enlightenment is seen through deepening reflection. I have gained understanding of 'institutional cultural or socially embedded ideologies that have been knowingly or unknowingly internalized' (Boychuk Duchscher 2000, p. 454). Chapter 1, *Setting Out* foregrounds the influence of my Christian values, education and training on my personhood and as a nurse. Building on insights gained through the narrative informed by literature, generating understanding of the influences of maternalism, emotional entanglement and influences within my role in a hermeneutic spiral, gathers momentum.<sup>323</sup>

## Empowerment

Empowerment is a subtle element, described as a cyclical process of lifelong learning and development (Kieffer 1984). My inquiry shows commitment to student kind as a backbone to enabling students to become person centred nurses, realised through a metaphor of a dialogical voice. This view is in keeping with the suggestion of Summerson Carr (2003) that personal transformation for the individual is the basis for empowerment whereby change in an individual's consciousness is a stepping stone to taking social action.

## Emancipation

Emancipation as explained by Fay helps understanding of

the oppressive features of a society, such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves (Fay 1987, p. 4)

Emancipation is a valuable premise in understanding contextual meanings within Irish nurse education which is newly integrated into higher education.<sup>324</sup> Designing curriculum, staff transfer arrangements, and buildings were prioritised

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<sup>323</sup> *Week in the life of Reflection* 19

<sup>324</sup> Transfer to higher education was a recommendation from the Commission on Nursing an outcome of industrial unrest

at the expense of strategic vision. This has been highlighted in several papers. McNamara (2010) in a discourse analysis of Irish academics reveals a 'dependent, fragmented discipline with a weak academic infrastructure' p. 249. In another, Drennan and Timmons (2012, p. 749) identify attention was paid to establishing a discipline at a cross roads between a pursuit of liberal education, supporting students to 'think beyond their own discipline... free to be self-critical and reflexive' concurrently preparing students to be efficient workers. A further dichotomy in keeping with McNamara's (2010) analysis is supported by Ross and Marks-Maran (2013), exploring nurse academic leaders' roles in the UK. They recommend further discussion between universities, nursing academics and practice to clarify the contribution of academic nursing as knowledge producers interlinked to quality of patient care and service to communities. These papers offer a glimpse of the context of nurse education implicit in my narrative, key to influencing transformation.

## **Transformation**

My journey shows my early feelings of disempowerment and despondency. Gradually insights inform a shift towards enlightenment, revealing a sense of resilience an emerging positivity, empowerment towards transformation. Developing poise, emotional intelligence, courage and tenacity, are key leadership skills, in speaking up for nursing and nurse education (Ross and Marks-Maran, 2013). Central to the process of appreciating these influences is guidance and dialogue. As Greene (1978, p. 2) writes

to be in touch with our landscapes is to be conscious of our evolving experiences, to be.

This moves from the archaeology of my narrative as Kearney (2002, p. 13) describes using Heidegger's words

from unconcealment, we uncover something else, something more.... In essence a journey that is always in the process of evolving.

## Summary

This chapter offers meanings, framed through being available, becoming student kind. I have used literature to illuminate insights through a reflexive narrative in being and becoming a reflective nurse educator. My vision is realised through an emerging appreciation of spirituality as an expression of a growing sense of mindfulness.

My inquiry shows how managing self-care practices, so personal concerns and tensions and dilemmas do not hinder student-teacher relationships, leads to a developing poise. An emergence of dialogic voice is a critical marker of the journey. Being available in this way supports a slow process of transforming self towards creating and sustaining an environment where becoming student kind is possible. This last element is most challenging and understanding the forces and traditions that constrain such vision is valuable. On the one hand I reveal personal growth and transformation. On the other hand, I acknowledge a sense of incompleteness, a limitation, a failure to effect change. The question is whether insights are mere rhetoric or mere romantic attachments, or is being available a potential revitalising force? Does my a narrative tell a story, in keeping with the wisdom of Okri (1997) where, storytelling is

always quietly subversive. You think it faces only one way, but it also faces you. When you think it is harmless, that is when it springs its hidden truths, its uncomfortable truths, on you. It startles your complacency (p. 43).

Becoming student kind shares a vision of being in relationship with students, a listening presence, in dialogue, appreciating caring, empathy and compassion in effectively meeting student needs. Mayeroff (1971, p. 76.) offers a way towards appreciating the purpose of my life 'what it is, I am to serve'. Thus, appreciating limitations in my role in a complex pressurised university culture, where traditional scientific models continue to reign at the expense of philosophy. These are beyond simple solutions. Rolfe (2013) in what he describes as a 'polemic' pleads

as with all wicked problems, the first and most important step is simply to start.<sup>325</sup>

Finally, Green (1978) uses the term 'wide-awakeness' of landscape as a paradigm shift that is 'shattering and emancipatory', describing aesthetic, moral and intellectual encounters that disturb as well as confuse. Is this not the nature of awakenings?

I suggest that a strength of the inquiry is a vision of becoming student kind, a key insight guiding opportunities for leadership as understood by Greenleaf (2002), towards discovering unmapped landscapes for self, transforming and sustaining a vision for nurse education. In so doing, noting, Wheatley and Kellner-Roger's (1996, p. 88) commentary

life is in perpetual motion, 'becoming becoming.' The motions of life swirl inward to the creating of self and outward to the creating of the world. We turn inward to bring -forth a self. Then the self extends outwards, seeking others, joining together.

I have set out my exploration of deepening insights, engaging with literature illuminating being available, becoming student kind as a nurse educator. I now, turn to Chapter 5, my *Afterword*, reflecting on my journey of constructing a reflexive narrative.

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<sup>325</sup> Rolfe (2013) Rethinking reflective Education: what would Dewey have done? Keynote paper at the NET Networking for Education in Healthcare conference, Churchill College Cambridge, 4 September 2013

## Chapter 5 Afterword

*We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be  
to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*

(T. S. Eliot)<sup>326</sup>

### Introduction

This afterword is inherent in the 6<sup>th</sup> dialogical movement (Johns 2010). I reflect on the journey of self-inquiry and transformation towards self-realisation in being and becoming a nurse educator, thus meeting the aims of the inquiry.

I begin by drawing the threads of the reflexive narrative journey together inviting the reader to engage in a spirit of 'co-production' (Okri 1997, p. 41). In so doing, I pose the question - has the writer composed an inquiry that makes sense?. Does the work result in a sense of satisfaction as 'confusion is lifted and things fit into place?' (Eisner 1991, p. 58). I then turn to consider the confluences of the overarching elements of guidance, ethical relationships, and writing in shaping a reflexive narrative. I offer five key stepping stones for reflection as a foundation for a nursing curriculum.

### Journey

I have learned to dialogue but it has not been an easy journey. Shope (2006, p. 165) mirrors my thoughts

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<sup>326</sup>Eliot, T.S (1963) Little Gidding Stanza V, *Four Quartets Collected Poems 1909-1962* [1942] London Faber and Faber Ltd p.222<sup>326</sup>

when you are preparing for a journey, you own the journey. Once you've started the journey, the journey owns you.

A route tossed by tides, engulfed by mists which cleared<sup>327</sup> giving occasional glimpses of *Tír na nÓg*.<sup>328</sup> I tacked back and forth, seeking fair winds and clarity in dialogue with guides, writing, reading, reflecting and even when not consciously doing so, all three. Thoughts rippled to the surface, finding a way as in *The tide turns towards transformation*.<sup>329</sup> This experience is in keeping with Ellis and Bochner's (2000, p. 744-745), view that it is the journey not the destination, that matters.

I adopted and adapted a reflexive narrative approach for the first time in an educational sphere, giving it my slant and a structure relevant to my inquiry. At the outset, the forward outlined how the thesis is different, illustrated through chapter structures and exemplified in this final chapter. I have steered away from the traditional format, to a contemplative space. Such freedom and creativity came with challenges and risks in representation (Loftus *et al.* 2011). Writing by Duncan about subjectivity within an autoethnographic lens has resonance

the eye of the researcher should not be considered a mechanical devise for seeing. It should be understood as enlightened by human qualities (Duncan 2004, p. 30)

This approach is in keeping with Wilber *et al.*'s (2008)<sup>330</sup> descriptions of practice that makes sense of pre-modern wisdom and modern scientific traditions towards postmodern as a composite map of

human territory of you - and ways to include (and not marginalise) all of the important dimensions of your own being; physical, emotional, mental and spiritual - in self, culture and nature (Wilber *et al.* 2000, p. xvi).

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<sup>327</sup> Summer School 2009

<sup>328</sup> A mythical realm of everlasting youth, beauty, health, abundance and joy, its inhabitants are the Tuath Dé the gods of pre-Christian Ireland

<sup>329</sup> Reflection 11

<sup>330</sup> writing of Integral Life Practices



My inquiry has shown an interrelationship between these traditions, interweaving practice and theory, exploring the meaning of my practice and how I engage in my role, as each informs the other. Chapter 2, *Constructing a reflexive narrative* detailed the methodological approaches which generated and made possible my inquiry as an exemplar of reflexive narrative.

Through dialogue I have gained an understanding of the dynamics of organisations. The question of whether my inquiry is considered as research presented with integrity and generating research outputs within the politics of what is classed as translational research remains unanswered. This view is acknowledged by Denzin (2011) calling for qualitative researchers to dialogue to  
create a new narrative...that teaches others that ways of knowing are always partial moral and political (p. 654).

I have gained a deeper awareness of mindfulness as spirituality giving me energy, positivity, leading to a sense of well-being, giving meaning to my work. I revealed new ways of thinking of relationships between student and teacher showing insights relevant for nurse education. Seeing insights in this way required new ways of expressing and sharing these insights with the purpose of helping people to see the world in new ways. As O' Donohue (1997, p. 164) writes 'when you are faithful to the risk and ambivalence of growth, you are engaging your life.' Constantly aware, that there were multiple interpretations and no universal truth, acknowledging subjectivity within my inquiry. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, p. 973) believes that building a theory is more closely linked to 'theory as tapestry'. However, I liken my inquiry to more of a sea salted roughly patched sail where my stitching zig zagged back and forth in narrative construction.

The selection, inclusion and exclusion of reflections have been explained in Chapter 2, *Constructing a reflexive narrative*. In reflecting on my narrative I now

take a different slant. My stories as lived, wander meander across time and place, always incomplete, fluctuating as is real life. As Wheatley and Keller Rogers (1996, p. 90) write

life coheres into selves and systems... It brings together seemingly separate elements to create and discover new meaning. Life moves, creating more of itself in the inimitable space and wholeness.

I resisted the urge to rewrite, edit, to clean up and polish text, appreciating that such cleaning in itself would be another story. This is a hallmark of practice inquiry as it reflects the day to day as lived on the edge of the margins, mirroring the real world of humanity. I was frustrated, when reviewing stories. I noted a scattering, sequence of unanswered questions within which I dwelt without answering. Initially, I saw this as a sign of superficial analysis, a failure to engage in deep reflection. Guidance was critical when I despaired, helping me dwell with the confusion as slowly bubbles of significance surfaced. In this way, my stories reveal concerns about social and political inequalities and injustices (Horsfall 2009). I now appreciate that I cannot change the university system. I am not naïve, nor despondent, but poised, understanding the nature of my reality (Fay 1997). Now I see things differently rather than searching for premature solutions. Instead noting Rilke,<sup>331</sup> 'it is not the answers that show us the way, but the questions'.

I appreciate that such nuances are critical for learning, an interplay, between thinking, writing and reflecting, as past reflections influence the present. As Wheatley and Kellner Rogers (1996, p. 69) write

towards a future that cannot be determined. It can only be experienced as it is occurring. Life doesn't know what it will be until it notices what has just become.

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<sup>331</sup>Rilke ,R.M. (1903) *Letters to a Young Poet* [translated by M.D.Herter] New York: W.W Norton& Comp Inc.

I could revisit elements which I explored within the narrative including the ‘velvet glove,’<sup>332</sup> men in suits,<sup>333</sup> domination and oppression<sup>334</sup> and learning approaches. My inquiry as constructed reflects a struggle in balancing depth and breadth, in keeping a narrative whole.

Constructing and illuminating a narrative interweaves several layers which strengthen, shape and influence the narrative. These layers originally explored in Chapter 2 *Constructing a reflexive narrative*, to which I now return given their significance to my inquiry, namely; guidance, ethical relationships, and writing.

## Guidance

Through guided dialogue I learned to hear the essence in messages about my background. At the outset, I positioned myself in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*. Gradually awareness surfaces from where I was, to where I am. Such learning about self, and self in relation to others, is the essence of reflexive narrative. Richardson and St Pierre (2005) claim writing is always partial within the context of situations. In this way, I make sense of my world, in a broader historical and sociological context, flowing through reflections in dialogue with literature, community and guides.

The narrative has illustrated reflection as lived rather than a theoretical development of reflection. My inquiry is grounded in the everyday reality of messy practice, offering a lens to a better understanding of self and my world, the heart of the inquiry. Developing insights central to such narrative are not neatly marked, their shape is ethereal, a never ending quest. By its very nature, reflexive narrative blurs boundaries between self and the research. Managing

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<sup>332</sup> *The tide turns towards transformation*, Reflection 11

<sup>333</sup> *Money matters, Erica’s story*, Reflection 13; *Back to Earth*, Reflection 17

<sup>334</sup> *Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust*, Reflection 5

this tension is enabled through an interwoven synergy in dialogue and co-creation within a guided reflective community.

Synchronicity occurs in how guide and supervisor move to create dialogue. This is illustrated through several excerpts. A significant moment is seen in *Come to the edge*.<sup>335</sup> I show how I moved from a didactic teaching approach with students towards dialogue. Sensitive guidance helped me address apprehensions about how a new module<sup>336</sup> impacted on time and energy for my inquiry. I wrote

In December, a chance discussion with CJ, a twist of fate when my thoughts were initially about workload, led to dialogue and a guiding challenge - in essence a simple question floated in the air -why not shift completely towards dialogue? I know that I want to do something different but why? What is the evidence guiding me?

On another occasion, recalling CJ said 'be sceptical' of literature; refrain from becoming too attached to ideas. Being asked how and why I use each reference, questioning the authority of the literature used to support reflection added rigour. Chapter 3, *Narrative* has many examples of my descriptive use of literature. Throughout the inquiry, the guide encouraged critical dialogue through conversation, gently and timely probing

CJ: How does the literature enhance the reflection?

What would you do differently?

What is significant about this experience?

How does this fit in with the plot of your narrative?

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<sup>335</sup> Reflection 14

<sup>336</sup> Over the course of the inquiry I was given responsibility as module leader for several new modules at post graduate level.

Over the journey, I began to echo the cues in responding to a creative reflection posted by Justin Haroun.<sup>337</sup> For the first time, I posed ‘What is the significance of the text in relation to your overall narrative? My insights helped me frame a question arising from my struggle when searching for focus - searching for insight on how to ‘show not tell’. And again when preparing a draft of Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*, I was unhappy with some elements, trying to be mindful, waiting for inspiration. Emails, from CJ, ‘have patience.’ Virtual and face to face conversations continued. Maria Fordham offered wisdom when my exasperation continued. I tried to find a structure that represented the narrative writing

Dwell with the confusion,<sup>338</sup>

Have patience it [Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*] will come.

Don’t’ despair’

These ordinary phrases sustained me, in crafting the thesis, at a time when I was concerned about the unique contribution of knowledge and a typical doctoral student question; when is a thesis ever enough? Such dialogue helped me more than any texts on thesis writing.

Late, in December 2013, at a session when I was muddled about my structure and finding a title that represented the work. Conversation ebbed and flowed. I scribbled ‘knots’ on my page, CJ reminded me of the use of ‘lines and knots’ in Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*. In considering how best to represent my insights, eventually, I illustrate the ethereal nature of my emerging spirituality through the Celtic triskele.

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<sup>337</sup> A member of our reflective community *The Dance* session December 2013

<sup>338</sup> As in keeping with much quoted phrase of Okri



Figure 5.1, Sketch of trinity knot, Triskele

Towards the end, I posted a mail to our narrative group;

Today's musing<sup>339</sup>

Idea anybody, how about *Being and Becoming a Reflective Practitioner: stepping stones towards student kind vision?*<sup>340</sup>

Still not a good fit. I reworked Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*, posting again in May 2014

How about? *-Being available, becoming student kind: a nurse educator's reflexive narrative.*

This becomes the title. These snippets illustrate my sense of being a member of a reflective community, in co-creation. I share explicit examples, but there are many implicit threads, throughout the inquiry. Being part of a learning community has been characterised by connection and engagement, akin to a community of practice (Wenger 1998). Dialogue as understood by Johns (2010) builds on Bohm's (1996) concept of presence, trust, flowing towards shared meaning. These concepts then create a space so that

people are able to listen freely to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other (Bohm 1996, p. 3).

The link between dialogue and guidance and reflection seems to be absent from literature other than the work of Johns. Many authors, writing on reflection, describe frameworks for reflection such as Gibbs (1988) and Mezirow (1981).

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<sup>339</sup> Email post 13 December 2013

<sup>340</sup> Series of Emails 13 December 2013

Ghaye (2011) writes of reflective conversations. Clarke (2014) reports on a person centred inquiry exploring staff and students perception of experiences of reflection. While findings mention discussion and empathy, none of the studies include any reference to guided reflection. Whereas Johns (2013, p. 81) writes that the guide supports the learner to 'become more aware, more proprioceptive of her thinking and being'.

Skilful guidance could be said to be enacted though being available. There is a delicate balance between being a guide and being a supervisor. In my experience skilful guidance fosters the emotional intelligence of the learner to see things differently. This is a view in accord with Wisker *et al.*'s (2003) research finding, that a supervisor involves being a coach, role model, facilitator, ultimately showing emotional intelligence. My experience is in keeping with Lee's (2008, p. 267) finding whereby the student is encouraged to

question and develop themselves, developing a quality relationship: where the student is enthused, inspired and cared for.

For me guidance anchors learning, without which there is no deep reflection. In an integral approach, the guide refrains from explicitly telling the person what to see. Instead the guide takes a dialogical approach, so that a person feels safe to disclose and explore experiences more deeply.

## **Ethical relationships**

I was troubled about safeguarding ethical practices that embody research (Higgs *et al.* 2009). Ethical deliberations influenced my narrative where protecting the names of people and place was explained in Chapter 2, *Constructing a reflexive narrative*. Reviewing the narrative shows how concerns hindered my ability to share reflections. I was disturbed about the focus of reflection and how to adhere to ethical principles beyond conforming to the requirements of ethic committee scrutiny. The practice of being ethical; was threefold, requiring

vigilance, sensitivity and freedom. There was awareness of tensions between freedom to write reflections that needed to be written, providing meaningful data for interpretation, while providing for protection of individuals and organisations. This view was in accordance with Bochner (2001 p. 154) who extolls sharing of stories

shrouded in silence to bring, our intellect and emotionality together to merge the personal and the academic and to give something back to others draws us to the poetic, moral and political side of narrative work.

Layered through the narrative, are concerns about practising what I call ethical mindfulness. Pondering in *Emails that we(d) read to see and phone calls that we need to listen to*.<sup>341</sup> I have written this in a superficial way as seen in my ethical scrutiny application outline (Appendix 3)

Ethical mindfulness is underpinned by Ghaye's (2007) approach which describes 'ethical relationships based upon respect for the 'Other' (p. 158).

And

Sensitivity, towards individuals, organisations and 'respect for boundaries' will be maintained throughout the study (Manias and Street 2001, p. 235).

I took an approach somewhat similar to Jarret (2009) in moving away from writing about colleagues to focus on reflections with students. As time passed, concerns regarding identifying individuals lessened, acknowledged in *Loyalty, furtively seeking to protect trust*<sup>342</sup> writing

these thoughts have been lurking at the back of my mind but now staring me in the face, asking about 'boundaries' across a practice research inquiry?

I used other mechanisms to protect privacy such as the use of poetry in *Spring of [un]planned pregnancy*<sup>343</sup> and in *The tide turns towards transformation*<sup>344</sup> noting

fictionalise the narrative—gives me freedom from this emotional entanglement - trying to protect everyone.

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<sup>341</sup> Reflection 3

<sup>342</sup> Reflection 5

<sup>343</sup> Reflection 7

<sup>344</sup> Reflection 11



I teased out a tension in writing about my role, commenting

I strive to be careful in representation of colleagues. They are the backbone, supporting my work, so it is vital that I work in a respectful trusting manner.<sup>345</sup>

There was a sense of conflict between my responsibilities as an employee and my journey. This undercurrent was addressed in *A helix*<sup>346</sup> where my fears hindered insights around meetings and exposing colleagues. A paradox; between telling as a moral act and the inaction of silence, a reminder of Brookfield's (1995) idea of 'cultural suicide'.

Nevertheless, I have a heightened awareness of my responsibilities of giving ethical voice to sharing student suffering, bringing to the forefront a student kind approach to facilitating student learning. Richardson and St Pierre (2005, p. 959) suggest that writing as a method of inquiry 'coheres with the development of social action'. Furthermore, my narrative mentions family and colleagues. I value their opinion and friendships so have checked and shared before inclusion in the text. Yet, I continue to be aware that my narrative is primarily about self and transformation which is always grounded in my stories. I now have a greater understanding of how to manage the ethical influences in constructing a coherent authentic narrative.

## Writing

Writing is integral to composing a reflexive narrative which grows in significance in learning to write, writing to learn and writing as voice. I began by paying attention to writing in Chapter 2 *Constructing the narrative*. Now I return to writing at the final homecoming chapter. As Cixous (1991, p. 19) eloquently writes

Sometimes one has to go very far.  
Sometimes the right distance is extreme remoteness

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<sup>345</sup> ibid

<sup>346</sup> Reflection 18

Sometimes it is in extreme proximity that she breathes.

I suggest that writing *is* the research. Grace *et al.* (2009) describing writing as message- and meaning-making in all their forms. My work is in keeping with this view, whereby I used images and poetry to help communicate. As van Manen (1990) notes, a qualitative researcher is

an author who writes from the midst of life experience where meanings resonate and reverberate with reflective being (p. 125).

van Manen continues

not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew (p. 127).

Thus, writing is a process for expression, progression and formation. In reflexive narrative this is taken a step further, a step described as transformation (Johns 2010). The potential in understanding research in this way is significant in moving from old ways of understanding towards new horizons. It is a way of taking action and creating knowledge.

Towards the end of the journey, as mentioned, I struggled trying to write Chapter 4, *Being available, becoming student kind*.<sup>347</sup> Emergent mindfulness was vital in getting me to the end. Poise informed my writing in refining the thesis, sustaining me through the 'fear and loathing factor' that Dunleavy (2003, p. 198) describes in *Authoring a PhD*. My PhD was no different. The arduous nature of writing is described by Belenky author of *Women's way of knowing* in conversation with Ashton-Jones and Thomas<sup>348</sup> saying

I find writing so hard, so arduous, so painful. If you're engaged as I am in research that's embedded in interpretive-descriptive processes, your major research tool is trying to articulate clearly the understandings that you're coming to-and writing is integral to this process.

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<sup>347</sup> Draft 1, outline, July 2013 through to draft 5 July 2014

<sup>348</sup> Ashton-Jones, E., Thomas, D.K. (2000) Composition, collaboration, and women's ways of knowing: a conversation with Mary Belenky Journal of Advanced Composition, p.277[Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014]

While in the midst of the struggle in composing the thesis, frustration began to seep into my bones. As happened one morning, sitting in front of the laptop I wondered how to get my point across, looked at my hand on the keyboard and saw wet, salty tears. After an hour lost in darkness, I returned to writing staying close to my vision. I scribbled a poem entitled a *Captain of My Destiny* included as Appendix 7.<sup>349</sup> I use this as an example of how writing in a playful way freed me, to revision the shape of Chapter 4, *Being Available, Becoming Student Kind*. Such learning does not fit in a linear traditional research audit trail. This is a reminder that the inquiry is guided by differing rules of injuncture. Learning the tools, therefore, in constructing any doctoral inquiry demanded resilience, persistence, patience and ultimately guidance.

In the beginning, I used literature in an incidental rather than a purposeful way. I studied the texts of qualitative researchers such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 2011), and Polkinhorne (1998). Alongside these texts I was introduced to texts from a wide range of disciplines across world views of knowledge, from empirics to spiritual and literary disciplines [O'Donohue, Okri, Bohm and Wheatley]. Engaging with our reflective community and guide in dialogue with such texts has enabled me to think through and make sense of my narrative. As Richardson and St Pierre (2005, p. 973) suggest this may not have happened if I was thinking alone. I suggest that this drift is both reasonable and vital to an inquiry concerned with the ontological, stressing experience as subjective. Gradually, these texts have become critical to my work, integral to revealing my intuitive, aesthetic ways of knowing. I knew that nature attracted me. I knew that more poetic language appealed to me. I had thought that this was a reaction to the more scientific writing style expected in academia. Bochner (2001) in a thought provoking paper debates and refutes the challenges of 'romanticism and sentimentality' in autoethnographic writing. In a similar vein, Wilber (1998, p. 6) writes that individual approaches give

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<sup>349</sup> This poem is a play on a television advertisement for Guinness

us as it were a corner of the kosmos each is telling us something very important about various aspects of the known world.

A slow dawning in my search for meaning lead me to an appreciation that being mindful, expressed through spirituality, is a pattern within the core of being available, becoming my vision of student kind. The use of poetry, imagery and art are aesthetic forms, helped me reach and touch an ethereal, intellectual and emotional concept such as student kind. As Denzin's (1984) comments it is through emotion, individuals understand and gain knowledge of the ways of the world, emotion is what makes the relationship between them and the 'real world.' This was achieved through the ever evolving hermeneutic spiral of describing and reflecting.

I have become aware of a partial view of my reality in how reflexive narrative as lived by Johns (2010, 2013) in its totality is complex to enact, create and interpret. Cixous (1994, p. xvi)<sup>350</sup> offers a view on the idea of totality and memory, writing, 'where no one fragment holds the entirety'. For me each reflection was individual, each reflection informed and dependent on the previous and the next, 'it is the whole that makes sense' (Cixous, 1994, p. xvi). Waiting and bringing ideas together has been spoken about by Irish writer Sebastian Barry<sup>351</sup> saying

trust that in deep water, that there is something there, waiting for the whistle tune to come.<sup>352</sup>

My journey throughout the inquiry was sustained through guidance in co-creation with my fellow travellers. I learned through reflecting, paying attention to significance of experiences, gaining insights. In so doing, I have gained an in-depth understanding of being a reflective educator.

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<sup>350</sup> Preface to *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1994) xvi. Text translated by Susan Sellers and revised by Hélène Cixous

<sup>351</sup> Irish author of *The Secret Scripture* speaking at the Kate O'Brien Weekend Limerick Literary Festival 23 February 2014.

<sup>352</sup> Reference to a whistle player waiting for notes while composing a melody

## **Becoming a reflective nurse educator**

An aim of my inquiry was to describe a vision and interpret insights, achieved through illuminating being available, becoming student kind as a guiding theoretical concept. My vision as an approach to be being with students is renewed. I can be available, self-caring and care for the other. Mayeroff (1971) illuminates his understanding of caring which is in keeping with the embedded nature of being available to students expressed as student kind being a reflective nurse educator as

I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but helping the other grow I do actualize myself. My dependency on the other is bound up with respecting and furthering its integrity, which is very different from a parasitic relationship in which I possess the other and am unable to experience it as existing in its own right (Mayeroff 1971, p. 40)

Continuing, Mayeroff offers a way of being that gives a compass to guide me towards appreciating the purpose of 'what it is I am to serve' (p. 76), rooted in my own being. I interpret being available being student kind as a way of being in relationship with students. I now take Mayeroff's view acknowledging the meaning of life is 'commensurate within my powers and limitations'. This freedom enabled my becoming as a reflective nurse educator. I can be available and in turn provide opportunities for student to develop and appreciate the potential of being available as nurses in relational care with patients. In a keynote address Bochner (2008) explains that in being a reflective practitioner

one must be willing to examine and reflect on events in one's own practice and to focus on the effects of those events on the findings, thoughts and well-being of those people involved in the events ... to unfurl knowledge can also mean to flower, to blossom.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Personal notes from 14<sup>th</sup> International Reflective Practice Conference Rotorua New Zealand September 2008

I take The Sapeurs view as represented in the video *The men inside the suits*<sup>354</sup> upon which I based my poem *Captain of my destiny* (see Appendix 7),

you can't choose what you do

You can choose what you are...

So my inquiry has led to personal change, returning to St Pierre's (2000, p. 27) challenge to 'produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently'. In keeping with this idea, I suggest that I now see self and my practice differently. Senge *et al.* (2004, p. 137) writes of the power of 'crystallizing intention, once you arrive at a place of genuine 'knowing'. Intention is not a powerful force, its the only force.'

Insights revealed through my journey have led me to identify five stepping stones seeking dialogue to:

1. Value the contribution of guided reflection as a foundation for nurse education
2. Advance educators expertise in supporting guided reflection as a capstone for student learning
3. Foster reflective learning environments that develop student potential flourishing towards a lifelong commitment to person centred nursing
4. Collaborate with teams towards re-visioning a curriculum embedded in reflection for students and educators, connected and responsive to community society and global challenges
5. Reclaim education expressed as reflective learning as a core learning activity in nurse education.

I have been inspired by many women, described in Chapter 1, *Setting Out*, by educators; Barbara, Catherine, by many colleagues, and by family. I have been nurtured and sustained along a journey in the company of community, guides

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<sup>354</sup> Guinness advertisement video. The Sapeurs are a society of elegant persons of the Congo, a group of working class men who are devoted to dressing up in dapper clothing.

and supervisors. In turn, I never thought that I could, would or should have any influence. In May 2014, I got the following feedback from a student<sup>355</sup> at a public forum

Margaret is inspirational. Long after the conversations in class we continue over coffee.

I include the quote less for affirmation (I am actually embarrassed by the quote) but more as an example of how reflective practice can lead to students to continuing in dialogue, taking responsibility for their own learning. Learning to dialogue is a spiral - becoming student kind with individual students, in class, across landscapes and horizons of learning generating conversations of possibilities.

The final chapter explores the contribution that reflexive narrative inquiry makes to my practice as an educator and as a research approach and considers the strengths and challenges therein.

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<sup>355</sup> Post graduate MSc programme

## Chapter 6 Heading towards an uncertain future

*So hope for a great sea-change*

*Believe that further shore*

*Is reachable from here.*

*Believe in miracles*

*And cures and healing wells.*

(Seamus Heaney )<sup>356</sup>

### Introduction

In this final chapter I aim to show how my inquiry has made a contribution to knowledge providing a perspective on the potential of reflection as a living learning strategy in a lifelong endeavour of transforming self and practice. Being available becoming student kind is a novel concept that has revealed the value and potential of Johns reflexive narrative as a practice based inquiry. Wellington (2010) when describing the purpose of a doctorate considers the questions,

to what extent was the doctoral journey a vehicle for personal development, learning and growth; and to what extent is it a contribution to the body of knowledge in an area of study? (Wellington 2010, p. 136).

I reflect on these questions related to the core purpose of my inquiry and experiences of constructing a reflexive narrative that illuminates being and becoming a reflective nurse educator. When starting out and taking the first

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<sup>356</sup> Heaney, S. (1990) Chorus *The cure at Troy: After Philoctetes by Sophocles* Derry: Field Day p.77



steps meeting my guide and fellow travellers I did not know where my inquiry would lead. As Souhami in *Coconut Chaos*<sup>357</sup> writes

one chance act, one simple random event, had dramatic ramifications that ripple through time, anywhere can be a destination. Usually we arrive where we choose to go (Souhami 2007, P. 39).

I revisit some elements that interweave through the thesis and now take a step back, entering a contemplative space that considers the strengths and challenges, raising questions about possible implications for future practice, education and research. A slant informed by Wolcott's (2009) suggestion in the value of identifying

what has been learned and what appears to be the next steps in an ongoing process of inquiry (Wolcott 2009, p. 119).

The chapter is framed around three interrelated elements that interplay across different rhythms producing a special version of chaos (Souhami 2007, p.101). Through the journey, I sought to find an underlying pattern in chaos, to see beyond such limitations (Wheatley 2006). I now consider how my inquiry contributes to my personal growth and development and the challenges in my transformation as an educator expressed as a dialogical voice. I then explore the potential and challenges in using a reflexive narrative methodology.

## **Personal growth and development**

In Chapter 4, *Being available becoming student kind*, and again in Chapter 5 insights around qualities that guide my relationships with individual students and in the classroom and beyond were identified. I have shown how awareness of my Celtic spirituality expressed as mindfulness sustains my vision. I have plotted how my insights have deepened around mindfulness along the journey. Initially, I identified a fore structure in Chapter 1, *Setting out*, which gained significance. I am gradually learning my way to becoming reflective in practice, being mindful 'seeing things for what they really are without distortion' (Johns 2013, p. 3).

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<sup>357</sup> Travel journalist inspired by chaos theory writing of her journey to Pitcairn Island, South Pacific

However, achieving such an understanding of reflection as lived is challenging. It takes time, energy, resources and structures. It can never be assumed that a person joining a group will realise their potential, in being reflective in keeping with Johns description. Nevertheless, the potential for deep learning requires conversations to advance such possibilities for others. Insights gained inform my role as a nurse educator.

## **Education**

Engaging in a sustained reflective odyssey has led to new insights contributing to how guided reflection is supported in curriculum revision. Discussions are needed to move beyond the rhetoric of curricula that promote the development of reflective practitioners as a learning outcome (NMBI, 2014)<sup>358</sup> without paying attention to how these aspirations are realised. Johns (2013) advocates a curriculum revolution which embeds reflection as a key learning strategy. I differ from Johns in continuing to believe in a 'velvet glove'<sup>359</sup> approach described in *Finding my voice* to incremental change rather than a curriculum revolution within my sphere of practice. I continue to champion reflection but appreciate that resources both human and structural are critical in sustaining change otherwise there is a risk of token inclusion of reflection.

Curriculum structures need to be both creative and flexible in accommodating student groups throughout education programmes. This is essential in sustaining a learning community based on trust, as a foundation to enable students to become reflective practitioners. Consequently, attention needs to be given to the expertise of guides in creating a reflective learning environment. Nurse educators need to have opportunities to refine meanings and purpose of reflection as a foreground to fostering reflection with students. Consideration needs to be given to the challenge - are all educators best suited to facilitating guiding reflection with students? Findings by McCarthy *et al.* (2013) support

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358 Draft standards and requirements

359 Reflection 10

these concerns. There are implications for policy makers devising standards and providing resources for a reflective nursing curriculum. There is a need, therefore, to create spaces to discuss and resolve such tensions in moving to embed reflection in curricula.

My inquiry has brought to the fore the tensions between the ideas espoused in nurse education in higher education institutions and the day to day reality. Challenges escalate in nursing curriculum around developing technical skills at the expense of person centred relational care. The thesis opens ‘a can of worms’ about how learning spaces are created to enable personal and professional growth and development? How can students be available to individuals and their families unless they are supported to develop as individuals? How can students practise compassion in therapeutic environments that are stretched to breaking point? They work in systems where there is more people looking for more care with fewer staff and fewer resources.<sup>360</sup> These questions draw attention to the almost insurmountable challenges facing nurse education. Still, I have learnt to understand things are the way they are as advocated by Fay (1987). I have learned skills to manage self within the complexity and chaos of nurse education at a crossroads between faculty roles as educators and/or researchers. A world where educators are expected to increase research outputs generate income in institutions competing for diminishing resources (McNamara 2010, Denzin 2011). A world, where less attention and reward, is given to fostering student learning and relationships. I seek opportunities to voice these concerns about the emergence of ‘peraversity’ as expressed by Rolfe (2103, p. 67) whereby a business model and bureaucracy rules at the expense of a core learning ethos. Discernment gained through close study of Fay (1987) guides me

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360 Burke, S. health policy analyst in [www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=22936](http://www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=22936) [Accessed 10th December 2013]

in facing these challenges within my sphere of influence guided by my vision. Other than descriptions by Rolfe and McNamara, there has been little mention of these challenges in nurse education. My inquiry gives support to these concerns. In such a journey of transformation there is an ethical need to share these concerns through a dialogical voice.

### **Dialogical voice**

My inquiry expands Belenky *et al.*'s (1986) research on voice, moving from an epistemological to an ontological view. I have found a rhythm and synergy between the work of Belenky *et al.* and dialogue as described by Isaacs and Bohm. For me, this has been significant and could be described as an epiphany. Such insight is a transferable skill that frees me to be the best that I can be. I practice my vision, using a dialogical voice, taking steps towards developing caring relationships with individual students, in the classroom and beyond. There is potential, therefore, in further exploration of dialogical voice as a metaphor for transformation within the context of reflexive narrative.

### **Reflexive narrative methodology**

Reflections on the use, potential and limitations within Johns (2010) narrative approach framed by six dialogical movements are considered in light of the concepts represented in Chapter 4, *Being available becoming student kind*. The inquiry is based on a practice related methodology as an emergent field, a new way of exploring personal and professional development. Nevertheless, my thesis is the fourth using this approach and a testimony to the growing robustness of the methodology. My inquiry is original to me, while acknowledging and building on the previous studies of nurse practitioners; Jarrett (2009),<sup>361</sup> Fordham (2012)<sup>362</sup> and Foster (2013)<sup>363</sup>. These practitioners,

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<sup>361</sup> Spasticity management nurse specialist

<sup>362</sup> Specialist public health nurse- homelessness

<sup>363</sup> Mental Health Nurse

members of our reflective community have influenced the development of my understanding. In so doing contribute to co creating the development of the approach while each differing in context, in a journey of being and becoming. These dissertations are not 'aggregations' as described by Lincoln and Denzin (2011, p. 717) but are cumulative in building a body of knowledge about pioneering self-study approaches. Gray (1996, p. 3) writing from a design field, proposed that future researchers investigate practice through dissertations that take more risks and are 'methodological trailblazers'. Such research approaches, will benefit from a growing peer group, and experiences of previous pioneers.

While creativity is expected in scholarly activity, it is not without risks. Framing the philosophical influences in a bricolage was a useful starting point. Johns narrative approach is both simple and multi-layered, sharing stories and showing insights within a hermeneutic spiral. It is strengthened by Johns movements creating a framework to plot a journey of transformation. The nineteen reflections generated an opening for deep reflection. The narrative shows a gradual almost imperceptible shift in thinking. Dwelling with and paying attention to the significance of experience revealed insights around self and my role as an educator. Nevertheless, the words significance and insight are themselves ethereal and may not easily emerge. This is another challenge in finding patterns within the narrative. For me, this was a slow dawning towards realisation in naming *Being available becoming student kind* as an overarching plot discussed in Chapter 4. This unique concept is central to my inquiry. It is not a certainty that such new knowledge around self and my journey of transformation as an educator, would have emerged through other methodologies.

The inclusion of unabridged reflections strives to show the reality of the 'swampy messy world' of practice as expressed by Schön (1983). This led to detailed multiple reflections which were neither succinct, nor polished, were sometimes

unwieldy, taking much space and paper. The intention, however, aimed to show authenticity as each experience overlapped and informed the next. Consideration needs to be given as to how best to present and represent reflections that illuminate a journey towards insight. Such challenges are compounded by the principle within narrative of show rather than tell. Thus, reflections are presented without signposting or interruption striving to hold the hermeneutic pattern whole. This may place demands on the writer in flagging analysis for the reader as themes lie deep within the narrative. It takes courage to keep within Johns narrative approach and resist more traditional thematic analysis as described by Burnard (1991) and Braun and Clarke (2012). This approach is a slow movement, therefore and requires support through expert guidance.

While narrative construction now seems clear to me, I grappled in understanding how to construct a narrative around the six dialogical movements. In the midst of writing up the thesis, I struggled to make sense of the structure which led to a myriad of emotions. I was confused, fearful. Was I foolhardy? Such fears and doubts added to a struggle in undertaking an ambitious approach. This in itself is a contribution to understanding practice based research. Perhaps, true for all doctoral students, another story waiting to be told. The final version may not capture the struggles and dilemmas along the way. I had moments whereby on one hand, I was energised and keen to be original and on the other, wished for traditional formulae to follow.

A limitation further intensified within self study which blurs boundaries between researcher and research. For me self study was a rigorous endeavour of looking into the innermost self, a baring of the soul. Reflexive narrative has the potential therefore, to be a destructive rather than a constructive learning process. I have got this far, but this is not a given. There needs to be a harmony, a fit between the research methodology, the individual and the supervision process. Guidance

and trust in expert supervision is critical, therefore, in appreciating the nuances in Johns (2010) approach. A further inference within the notion of supervision expertise is consideration of how best to address future supervision and succession planning.

Participation in guided group reflection is a strength and a challenge in Johns approach. The co- creation, synergy and shared learning has been illustrated in Chapter 5. The thesis would not have reached submission without a supportive reflective community. Attendance<sup>364</sup> necessitated negotiating work arrangements, compounded by distance already mentioned. Creative ways were found to lessen the impact, yet, the demands of study like those of any student impacted on family life. At times, it seemed like an overwhelming burden, when the question was raised at home –when will you be finished? Mostly, however, I felt enriched by a learning endeavour which helped my daily work life. Emerging poise and support from guide and our group individually and collectively, sustained me with the belief that my work had value. Nonetheless, an approach requiring study in another country incurred considerable financial cost.<sup>365</sup> I continued an option which may not be possible for others. Future students considering guided reflection need to give careful consideration to balancing demands of sustaining engagement and the potential rewards of undertaking a reflexive narrative methodology.

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<sup>364</sup> Session dates were planned and circulated for the year.

<sup>365</sup> Early travel arrangements altered and later winter and summer schools, day trip travel were self-funding, against a backdrop of a weakened euro.

## Concluding thoughts

Qualitative research, as understood in the early 21st century aims to promote change (Denzin 2011). Yet, according to an eminent qualitative researcher Lather (2007) such research is under ‘assault’ by political forces. Tensions continue between and across scientific evidence base paradigms and qualitative research. Such views are at a distance from Denzin’s (2011) position, whereby narrative research is predominately a compassionate and a critical interpretive social science endeavour. I have not got answers to such a paradox, but, can dwell with the questions. I am aware that there are multiple lens and multiple futures (Priessle 2011). I have used a pioneering approach to research in transforming self and practice. My inquiry has deepened my understanding of my role as a nurse educator aiming to ‘*emancipate*’ which resonates with Preissle (2011, p. 690). Denzin reminds us,

we come to the end which is only the starting point for a new beginning, the contested future (Denzin 2011, p. 681).

I go forward in an unknown uncertain future in the company of fellow travellers, in a world where knowledge is contested. I have poise, a growing mindfulness as my interpretation of Celtic spirituality interweaves my personal transformation as a nurse educator. I take care of self, staying close to nature, walking on beaches with family. I seek ‘further shore’ as expressed by Heaney at the beginning of the chapter. I leave a footprint for others to follow in the spirit of an Irish poet Sean O’ Riordáin

Do shiúil sé liom an mhaidin sin,  
Ár mbeirt ar aon chosán,  
Ag siúl ar ais sea tuigeadh dom,  
Chonac rian a gcos sa láib.<sup>366</sup>

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366 O’Riordáin ,S. (1952) Rian na gcos Eireaball Spideoige Baile Átha Cliath: Sáirseal agus Dill



Translated as

He walked with me that morning,  
The two of us on the one path,  
On returning I understood,  
Seeing his footprint in the mud <sup>367</sup>

As Illustrated, in a photograph with family footprints<sup>368</sup> at Slaudeen (Plate 6.1).



Plate 6.1 Slaudeen beach, Dingle Co. Kerry

My journey has not been an easy route. It has been long, but the joy and freedom that comes from such intensity is life affirming, restorative for self and I hope for others. The journey was sustained by a search for vision, through thoughtful guidance and an ephemeral trust in a community of fellow travellers.

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367 Translated by D. Graham

368 Sarah, Andrew, Robbie, Dan and Margaret

Finally, a reminder of Polkinghorne's (1988, p. 99) words

the writer and the reader now also function as parts in a whole communication event that occurs when the created narrative text is taken to be understood by different individuals.

My reflection on undertaking a reflexive narrative inquiry of *Being available becoming student kind* as a nurse educator aims to contribute to the development and potential of reflexive narrative as a way to develop insights. As Okri (2011, p. 23) writes

If one has not yet become oneself one cannot see the true self in others...To see, one must first be.

In this way, my story fuses self, educational practice, theory and research, through reflection, echoing a dialogical voice revealing practical wisdom. An end of the beginning as shared through poetry:

## **Becoming student kind**

Pausing  
Creating space  
Connecting  
Flowing with the unfolding moment  
Understanding presence

Concern for the other  
Being compassionate  
Appreciating choice  
Creative tension  
Ethical positioning

Being poised  
Searching for meaning  
Questioning self  
Asking questions about the questions  
Questioning my assumptions,  
Suspending my assumptions

Knowing self  
Accepting and valuing self  
Continuously shifting  
Shaping  
Trusting  
Silence a voice for presence  
Dialogue  
Synchronicity  
Co creating

Finding a vision  
Holding the vision  
Finding a voice  
For students  
For person centred nursing  
Creating a reflective learning environment  
In a spirit of harmony

Living well  
Loving kindness  
Being mindful  
Living the vision  
Becoming student kind.

## Appendix 1

### Protected Reflective Time

#### **Annual Report 2012-2013** **Protected Reflective Time: Guided Group Reflection**

**BSc. Nursing**

(General, Mental Health & Intellectual Disability)

**BSc Midwifery**

**Clinical Practice Internship**

**Module Code:** XXXXX

**Module Leader:** Margaret Graham

Department of Nursing and Midwifery

‘Discussing experiences we face, learning how to reflect and how to learn from situations and learning how to use literature to support our views’ (Cohort 2009).

#### **Background**

An Bord Altranais (2005) endorses reflection as a requisite underpinning education programmes and as a valuable tool for professional development for registered nurses and midwives. Protected Reflective Time has arisen from the Government of Ireland, Nursing Education Forum (2000, p. 72) recommendation that ‘specific periods of protected time be identified for reflection’. Protected Reflective Time is an entitlement for students within the internship period supported by Department of Health and Children (DoHC). It is a fundamental component of BSc Nursing/ midwifery internship modules. To pass these

modules students must successfully complete all components of the assessment strategy including;

1. Assignment (reflective practice portfolio)
2. Verification of the achievement of clinical competencies at level four
3. Fulfil programme requirements.

***Learning Outcomes of Protected Reflective Time:***

- Examine opportunities for students to integrate theory and practice
- Critically appraise and address own learning and development needs
- Prepare students for their transition to the role of registered nurse/midwife
- Develop and foster critical thinking and utilise evidence based research
- Identify personal & professional development required to enhance practice
- Provide opportunities for group guided reflection at University of Limerick

**Structure of Protected Reflective Time**

Protected reflective time incorporated hours equivalent to seventeen days, which included service hours and six days of which six incorporated guided group reflection sessions, where students attend university as part of their clinical placement 1 and 2 internship modules.

<b><i>Title</i></b>	<b><i>Day/s</i></b>	<b><i>Running Total</i></b>
<b>Introductory Workshop</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Guided Group Reflection Days by Faculty</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Service Hours</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>

Table 1, Overall time management structure of Protected Reflective Time:

**Introductory day**

The introductory day are held and facilitated at UL. Students are provided with information regarding; review of concept of reflection, the PRT structure, module assessment criteria, guided group reflection sessions, group membership arrangements, service hours and expectations.

Students meet their guided reflection group facilitator within their allocated groups. Feedback indicates that the time given to meeting with facilitators is valuable. This is significant, as there are considerable logistics involved in organising small rooms during semester time, requiring commitment and good will from facilitators at a very busy time of the semester. Attendance at the introductory day is compulsory.

### ***Guided group reflection sessions at University***

The students are divided into twelve groups, including two mental health, two intellectual disabilities, two midwifery and six general guided reflection groups. Each group has approximately 10 members. Group memberships remained constant throughout. Each group has a faculty member as their guided group reflection facilitator and meet over six days between January and June. Attendance to these sessions is compulsory and was recorded as practice hours.

### ***Service hours.***

Dates are negotiated with services. Each year this process begins in June to collaborate with health service partners to maximise support and limit disruption. The service hours allocated for protected reflective time which equated to the equivalent of eleven days is managed and co-ordinated by the individual services.

### **Annual report submitted to the local joint working group.**

The annual report builds on the success of previous years aiming to inform and enhance the quality of the student experience in collaboration with our Health Service Partners. The report demonstrates the commitment to the structures and approaches taken at the Department of Nursing and Midwifery in meeting

the requirement for professional registration programmes as required by an Bord Altranais (2005) and supported by DoHC).

The concept of Guided Group Reflection within Protected Reflective Time (PRT) is now well established, organised and facilitated during the internship period, in year 4 for all the Preregistration programmes. The structure of Guided Group Reflection within Protected Reflective Time for the cohort of BSc internship students is outlined. It is acknowledged at the outset that student have dual status during this time as employees and student of the university. The report summarises students' feedback received from the guided group reflection sessions facilitated by University faculty.

### **Practice collaboration**

We continue to respond to the recommendations in the site visit by An Bord Altranais in fostering the development of reflective practitioners with joint initiatives organised and supported by the CNME in collaboration with Practice Development teams,

### ***Key Recommendations***

- Keep the format and structure of the guided group PRT similar for the next cohort
- Continue to dialogue in forward planning the PRT dates and schedule with allocations teams in accommodating in minimising disruption with en HSE partners
- Continue to plan hold introductory day during pre- internship placement
- Dates already agreed and circulated for 2010 Cohort
- Continue to reinforce student responsibilities in negotiating days
- Emphasise the importance of the PRT assignment as critical in meeting the criteria for pass on the internship clinical placement modules.

### ***Conclusion***

Protected reflective time has continued to be evaluated very positively by all cohorts. PRT structures are resource intensive for both the university and services in implementing the arrangements across all disciplines and across all services. We continue to acknowledge the commitment and collaboration of the practice development teams in supporting PRT.

### **Summary of feedback from students across cohorts**

#### **Cohort 2006/2007**

*It was well worth having PRT*

*I enjoyed the group reflection and found it helped me a lot when listening to others experiences as well as reflecting on my own*

*Development of team building*

*Good to meet friends*

*The group helped me see different views [Evaluation by Graham, Hayes [Ryan], Deasy & McCarthy 2008]*

*PRT was very helpful and a good way of sharing and listening to experiences with other members of the group and helped to integrate reflection into everyday work situations*

*Reflecting on situations and ask myself how would I have done better in that situation and put a plan in place to enhance my professional practice.*

#### **Cohort 2008**

*Able to listen and learn from fellow students reflections on critical incidents*

*Opportunity to talk and relieve stress encountered on wards*

*Guided us to format, structure, and write our reflective practice essays*

*Learning to take positive aspects from incidences and learning from negative aspects*

*Trusting environment where you are free to talk among yourselves*

*Diary writing from placement and reading them to the group*

*The room setting was good,*

*Integrating reflection into everyday work situations*



### **Cohort 2009**

*It has helped me to tease out situations and look at what was good and bad.*

*Taking responsibility and accountability for my actions.*

*Learning how to do things differently*

*It gave us insight in how to reflect*

*It allowed me to time to reflect on my experiences in the hospital and was valuable in developing my knowledge of nursing.*

Students identified the value and support in taking time to discuss experiences with peers in the following comments;

*Realising that others are in the same boat*

*With the chaotic life in practice I did not realise how much I needed this time to have a chance to unwind*

*It was good to de-stress*

Students commented on the benefits of closed PRT groups, noted in the following;

*Safe environment to share my experiences and listen to others*

*Being with the same group of people was important, grew to trust each other, not afraid to share*

Finally, students identified that they would like PRT to be organised during the second semester in 3rd year. Some students suggested that PRT should be introduced and continued throughout the programme.

## Appendix 2

### Last offices Ag tabhairt aire

#### Reflection December 2008

This reflection is described using MSR in a linear format. It is an encounter during a clinical skills laboratory session with third year students. The Last Offices raising questions regarding the separation of the art and science of nursing within undergraduate programmes and the context of knowledge and practice skills for students.

#### Description of an experience that seems significant in some way

The session starts with introduction, a very short icebreaker, followed with a question about what mattered around death and dying. Student feedback outlines comments surrounding dignity and respect, spirituality, and family, health and safety aspects surrounding the practice of the Last Offices.

The module is very intense and there are competing demands on students' time. I offer the group an opportunity to read a report of qualitative research by Terry and Carroll (2008) exploring first-year nursing students encounters with the death of patients. The article is liberally illustrated with quotations from student participants which I believe has relevance for the session.

The students bow their heads and read, the silence was deafening there was no restless shuffling or movements of pens and there seemed to be an intensity of effort.

#### What particular issues seem significant to pay attention to?

Following the allocated time I invite discussion. Students say how real the themes seemed in the paper, mirroring their own experience. Some students describe the excellent support staff gave to them in practice and some felt alone and isolated. One student describes how she found her first incident of death as a student very stressful bringing back memories of her grandfather's death.

Another student had not yet experienced the death of a patient. Yet another student tells us about a situation when a patient that she really liked died on her day off she feels that she had let him down. We create a dialogue about death and dying, a sensitive topic. Later we undertake an activity on the physical tasks and skills surrounding last offices technically the purpose of the session.

#### How were others feeling and what made them feel that way?

Towards the end of the session I ask, how did the group find the session?

Typical comments;

*I found it very beneficial to discuss these issues as we all have the same fears and concerns*

*I didn't know anything about the last offices*

*The idea of handling a dead body is scary and I was anxious about it*

*It was good to talk about death with our classmates*

#### How was I feeling and why did I feel that way?

The experience grounded me in the reality of student vulnerability and a reminder of my personal first experience of the death of a patient. Since then and I have had many experiences of patients' death in practice, some positive and some negative.

Students seem to encounter similar situations today regarding caring for a dying person, care of the body after death, a daunting time. Have we developed better ways to help prepare students for the harsh realities of practice? Are we placing them in practice without offering processes to explore anxieties surrounding death?

#### What was I trying to achieve and did I respond effectively?

I had signposted the session in an attempt to prepare students for the topic. Initially my mind was in a dualist mode getting material, organising hand-outs selecting an article, checking the literature and local guidelines and planning the

sequence of sessions etc. I aimed to provide a forum for opportunities for dialogue on death and last offices. I felt that third year students might find it helpful to approach the session in an interactive manner. I wasn't overtly aware of my tacit knowledge of sensitivities surrounding death anxiety and nurse learners. I observe the non-verbal behaviours in the room, my intuition suggests that this is another rationale for reading and discussing it together rather than merely circulating the article electronically. I aimed to create a learning environment that challenges and supports students.

**Student feedback:**<sup>369</sup>

*Class interaction was encouraged and everyone's opinions taken on board the education for the emotional psychological needs of students is really important and the discussion explained why some mentors may be less than supportive in practice*

*I felt that we needed to talk about death and how we coped because we never had a lab on it and we are now in 3<sup>rd</sup> year*

*The majority of us don't know how to react*

*I found this subject quite hard as I have experienced a patient dying suddenly*

*At the same time it was reassuring to read about other students experiences and know that the reaction was normal*

*Even with support it is a difficult event to process emotionally*

*Importance of being able to show emotion & be professional*

*I always wondered and was nervous about the last offices it is something that we needed to be able to do and now I am less fearful*

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<sup>369</sup> Lab reports submitted at end of each session

The comments reveal for me student insight into their learning needs and raises issues as consumers of education programmes and challenges related to curriculum themes, sequencing and content.

What were the consequences of my actions on the patient [student], others and myself?

While, I signposted the session I did not make any suggestion that students who might have difficulties could decline to attend. Afterwards I wondered should have I offered this caveat. That is in itself a very protective maternal approach. If a student had a personal bereavement there is a possibility that topic might be very difficult.

I asked colleagues what would they have done and the response was that students would benefit from the discussion and they would encourage them to participate in the session. There are mixed reports regarding death education (Cooper and Barnett 2005). Consideration needs to be given to the educational approaches taken at the beginning and throughout the programme. Different approaches, with different students at different points through the programme.

What factors influences the way I was/am feeling, thinking responding to the situation personal, organisational, professional & cultural

However, I had not looked at the bigger picture about the positioning of topics and skills within the programme. While the topic is listed as a skill, other facilitators may or may not broaden the discussion. This is not explicit in documentation. Presently students are introduced to bereavement and 'breaking bad news' in the communication module in the second semester of year 1. Yet, it does not reappear until there is a skills lab on the last offices in third year. The session reawakens ideas on curriculum structure. Previous facilitation of the topic provided a greater emphasis on the emotional dimension allowing more time to discuss death and dying. At that time I found an article by Loftus (1998) useful in exploring student nurses' experiences of the death of

*their* patients. We used a publication by Terry and Carroll (2008). They report little progress over 10 years. It is always a sensitive topic and devising opportunities to explore student anxieties around death are necessary. Throughout literature there are many examples of the sadness and the rites and rituals practised around death. Larkin (1998) believes that death rituals have a fundamental role in Irish culture. This is exemplified in Irish folklore in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century description of the raw emotion expressed by Peig Sayers (1974)<sup>370</sup> while laying out her son's body. As Peig tells

I had to wash and clean my fine young boy and lay him out in death and there was no way out of it... I needed a heart of stone to be able to stand it (Peig 1974, p.183).

Larkin (1998) while referring to the work of palliative care nurses proposes that nurses involvement in traditional funeral practice may be a unique profession role. Questad and Rudge (2003) propose that the nursing care of the dead is nursing role largely unnoticed by other hospital workers. Such aspect of care may according to Ronaldson (2006) be very painful for the nurse. Yet nursing texts pay scant attention to the emotion associated with the rite of laying out a body for family and nurse. A once popular text by Ross and Wilson (1974, p. 215) in Irish schools of nursing note that

the period of dying is especially trying for the nursing staff. Many patients become dear to the nurse and she feels a sense of loss, but she must be able to maintain her equilibrium and control her emotions sufficiently to give the patient's relative and the other patients the support they need.'

Specifically Ross and Wilson (1974, p. 217) describe the last offices

as the care given to the body after death and as process that demonstrates respect and dignity. Through nursing care the patient is washed, dressed prepared for the mortuary'.

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<sup>370</sup> Irish text studied by Irish Leaving certificate students translated by B.Mc Mahon

The Marsden Procedure Manual (Mallett and Dougherty 2000) emphasize the importance of following correct procedures. Higgins (2008) outline the steps to be followed so that practitioners care be enacted in a safe legal and culturally appropriate manner. These sources offer details of skills, promoting dignity and respect. However, there is no mention to the anxiety for the people performing the age old rite that according to Major (2005, p.267) marks the transition between life and death.’ There is increasing mention of the psychosocial aspects in end of life care, but there seems to be little attention to supporting novices needs in care of the dead body as highlighted by Ronaldson (2006). Perhaps this is beginning to change as Jamieson *et al.* (2007) at least mention that nurse may need to support colleagues throughout the procedure. I am beginning to shift from physical to psychological aspects of nursing.

#### What knowledge did or might have informed me?

I know that **death** may still be seen as a taboo subject. I had knowledge related to end of life care and support for students who are distressed by encounters of death and dying. I was informed by the empirical findings of work by Loftus (1998) and Carroll and Taylor (2008). However while I had a planned a strategy to encourage dialogue it was more implicit than explicit. Knowledge related to the transition from person to corpse and the role of the nurse in mediating this transition between life and death as articulated by Quested and Rudge (2003) could have revealed so much more of this invisible aspect of nursing and will inform future facilitation of last offices. I am beginning to pay more attention to my approach to creating a learning environment.

#### To what extent did I act for the best and in tune with my values?

I believe in the notion of personhood when performing the last offices with students. The aim to provide a discussion was based on the premise that students are individuals and have individual fears and life experiences. Such discussion offers peer support. I believe that students are sources of knowledge

within themselves. Strategies to enable the articulation of this knowledge require both process and structure. Any opportunity to advocate for my approach moves me beyond my personal beliefs to an exploration of the literature to consideration of how such beliefs are realised in the programme.

How does this experience connect with previous experiences?

It reminds me of my first experience of the death of a patient. Una, my preceptor spoke to me while we were fixing up the man's syringe driver, saying how ill the man was and that he had not long left before death. I was at lunch when it happened and felt so bad that I wasn't there. Later, I understood that I did not really hear the message and was not prepared for the death of a patient.

Given this situation again, how might I respond differently?

I now appreciate the significance of this experience and give more time for reflection to guide the session so that we draw even more upon their experience and anxieties of last offices. Currently, there is a proposal to expand reflection throughout the programme, offering a greater shift towards student led learning.

What would be the consequences of responding in new ways for the patient [student] others and myself

We need to consider how decisions are made about the sequencing of modules and the teaching learning strategies that are used to enhance learning opportunities for students.

It is timely to have further dialogue around the institutional approach that according to Quested and Rudge (2003, p. 555) details how the body is

controlled, packaged and labelled, signifying the age old cultural practice associated with the change in status from living to definition of death

I am aware of the cultural use of language and cultural elements related to death. There is a traditional religious notion of the last duty of the nurse for the



patient. The words used corpse, deceased body. Such insight will help me advocate for more time to facilitate such discussion with students. Hegedus *et al.* (2008) reporting on the findings from a Hungarian study on death education recommend that one course is not enough and systems need to be developed in caring for students through small group discussion to communicate about anxieties and perhaps consider their own coping strategies.

#### What factors might constrain me from responding in new ways?

Lack of time and if perchance I am not teaching the module next year, lost opportunity. We seem to spend little time discussing our beliefs around curriculum. There are constraints around the ideal and the reality of curriculum as delivered. Is our emphasis increasingly concentrating on technical aspects?

#### How do I NOW feel about the experience?

The session brings to the surface an area of practice that I had neglected, significant for students that would benefit from further exploration. I am more aware of the need to move my experience from an individual perspective as a facilitator of learning to a more strategic consideration of the fit between the literature and support for students and end of life care.

#### Am I more able to support myself and others better as a consequence?

Reviewing the experience and providing opportunities to dialogue with students has rejuvenated my prior knowledge and interest in the topic. I liken such moments to the removal of a stone in the wall that surround systems and organisations.

It fosters my thinking and gives me a glimpse of insight which might guide curriculum discussion. I will endeavour to create space and time for dialogue to encourage students to take care of self. Larkin (1998), reporting on a phenomenological study of palliative care nurse in the west of Ireland, found that palliative care nurses place a value having time to care and titled the theme

*Aire* (taking care). My interpretation suggests that a value needs to be placed on time and opportunity to support their caring /'ag tabhairt áire'.

#### What insights have I gained? Reflexivity

The discussion regarding skills in a dualist model in relation to the last offices while worrying is confirmed in the literature. I need to be aware of the essence of both the art and science of nursing in reviewing our work and this is renewing for me. Last offices, is a fundamental nursing activity that requires prominence in any discussion related to skills. Mooney (2005) reports on a quasi - experimental research examining death education, concluding that education programmes need to be conducted in a way that encourages individual examination beliefs and attitudes over time. Ronaldson (2006) argues that novice nurses are supported through post death nursing to reduce distress and discomfort. At our session in addition to the journal article a space was created to foster dialogue. Such learning strategies seem appropriate when exploring the skills of post death care. There are concerns from practice whether student nurses and the fit for purpose on programme completion. Requests come in from our service partners do students know this can students do this? An awareness of the importance of a process whereby we respond to queries on skills and risk management and from service is valuable and informs my role.<sup>371</sup> How do we prioritise? How to reconcile these emerging tensions? Are we creating a dualistic approach and dealing with standard procedures, with an emphasis on the science and being less inclusive of the so called softer art of nursing? Educational priorities are stretching content like an elastic band, stretching till there is a final snap and a crisis looms. There is a need to dialogue. It is timely to revise the curriculum from a map of key skills and integrate reflection in a responsive and responsible manner informed by evidence and dialogue with students.

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<sup>371</sup> Haemovigilance, older person abuse management of aggression and violence, pressure area care, care of iv infusions, infection control, standard precautions, medication administration

## Appendix 3

### Research Ethics Scrutiny Documentation (Annex to RS1 form) University of Bedfordshire

(09/03/2010) Sara Spencer - RS1 mgramah cj 15.12.09\_1.doc

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#### UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

##### Research Ethics Scrutiny (Annex to RS1 form)

**Candidate:** Margaret Mary Graham

**Registration No.:** 0718026

**Research Institute:** Faculty of Health & Social Sciences

**Research Topic:** The journey towards realising my vision as a nurse educator

#### SECTION A To be completed by the candidate

The candidate is required to summarise in the box below the ethical issues involved in the research proposal and how they will be addressed. In any proposal involving human participants the following should be provided:

- clear explanation of how informed consent will be obtained,
- how will confidentiality and anonymity be observed,
- how will the nature of the research, its purpose and the means of dissemination of the outcomes be communicated to participants,
- how personal data will be stored and secured
- if participants are being placed under any form of stress (physical or mental) identify what steps are being taken to minimise risk

If protocols are being used that have already received UREC ethical approval then please specify. Roles of any collaborating institutions should be clearly identified. Reference should be made to the appropriate professional body code of practice.

Answer the following question by ringing/deleting **yes** or **no** as appropriate:

1. Does the study involve vulnerable participants or those unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, your own students)?  
**No**
2. Will the study require permission of a gatekeeper for access to participants (e.g. schools, self-help groups, residential homes)?  
**No**
3. Will it be necessary for participants to be involved without consent (e.g. covert observation in non-public places)?  
**No**
4. Will the study involve sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, substance abuse)?  
**No**
5. Will blood or tissue samples be taken from participants?  
**No**
6. Will the research involve intrusive interventions (e.g. drugs, hypnosis, physical exercise)?  
**No**

7. Will financial or other inducements be offered to participants (except reasonable expenses)?

No

8. Will the research investigate any aspect of illegal activity?

No

9. Will participants be stressed beyond what is normal for them?

No

10. Will the study involve participants from the NHS (e.g. patients or staff)?

No

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions or if you consider that there are other significant ethical issues then details should be included in your summary above. If you have answered yes to Question 1 then a clear justification for the importance of the research must be provided.

\*Please note if the answer to Question 10 is yes then the proposal should be submitted through **NHS research ethics approval procedures** to the appropriate **COREC**. The University Research Ethics Committee should be informed of the outcome

- clear explanation of how informed consent will be obtained,
- how will confidentiality and anonymity be observed,
- how will the nature of the research, its purpose and the means of dissemination of the outcomes be communicated to participants,
- how personal data will be stored and secured
- if participants are being placed under any form of stress (physical or mental) identify what steps are being taken to minimise risk

#### Ethical Issues

The characteristics of the reflective narrative research process focus on 'I' as an individual, developing and knowing self, integrating experiences through dialogue into a coherent narrative through guidance and supervision (Johns 2002).

Central to the self inquiry nature of the narrative research approach is the emphasis on 'me' and my learning with a continued awareness of the personal, social and political contexts in which I practice (Etherington 2007). Ethical considerations will inform every stage of the research and will be guided by principles related to confidentiality, dignity, privacy and equity (Parahoo 2006) and will be critical in devising strategies to protect self and the rights of colleagues with whom I interact daily.

The preservation of anonymity and confidentiality will be underpinned by Ghaye's (2007) approach which describes 'ethical relationships based upon respect for the Other' p158. Sensitivity towards individuals, organisations and 'respect for boundaries' will be maintained throughout the study (Manias and Street 2001p235).

An awareness that all parties are human and potentially vulnerable demands attention to the writing up of any research dilemmas that may occur and the manner by which they will be resolved will be integral to the research report. Sparkes (2007) recommendation that narratives be fictionalised and the creative forms of poetry and performance will be utilised where appropriate. As a nurse the research will be guided by the Code of Professional Conduct An Bord Altranais (2000).

October 2008

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The representations of individuals, place, organisations and any identifiers will be altered and will be central to balancing the management of the data while preserving the integrity of the narrative.

In protecting individuals pseudonyms will be used throughout.

Data will be held in a locked cabinet in my office and anonymised computerised data will be secured in password protected files.

Attention to the rigour and coherence of the work will be maintained through dialogue and detailed description of the process, opening the space for the reader to consider the significance and the quality of the report.

#### References

- An Bord Altranais (2000) Guidance to Nurses and Midwives Regarding Ethical Conduct of Nursing and Midwifery Research - Dublin: An Bord Altranais.  
 An Bord Altranais (2000) The Code of Professional Conduct for each Nurse and Midwife. Dublin: An Bord Altranais.  
 Etherington, K. (2007) Ethical research in reflexive relationships *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(5) 599-616  
 Ghaye, T. (2007) Is reflective practice ethical? (the case of the reflective portfolio) *Reflective Practice* 8(2) 151-162  
 Johns, C. (2002) *Guided Reflection Advancing Practice* Oxford: Blackwell Science  
 Manias, E. and Street, A. (2001) Rethinking ethnography: reconstructing nursing relationships *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 33(2) 234-242  
 Parahoo, K. (2006) *Nursing Research Principles Process and Issues 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd  
 Sparkes, A.C. (2007) Embodiment, academics and the audit culture: a story seeking consideration *Qualitative Research* 7(4) 521-550

Checklist of documents which should be included:

- Project proposal (with details of methodology) & source of funding
- Documentation seeking informed consent (if appropriate)
- Information sheet for participants (if appropriate)
- Questionnaire (if appropriate)

Signature of Applicant:

Date:

Signature of Director of Studies: C Johns

Date: 30 November

*This form together with a copy of the research proposal should be submitted to the Research Institute Director for consideration by the Research Institute Ethics Committee/Panel*

**Note you cannot commence collection of research data until this form has been approved**

#### SECTION B Consideration by Research Institute Ethics Committee/Panel

Comments:

Approved

Signature Chair of Research Institute Ethics Committee/Panel:

Date:

19/3/10.

If in the judgement of the committee/panel there are significant ethical issues for which there is not agreed practice then further ethical consideration is required before approval can be given and the proposal with the committee/panel's comments should be forwarded to the secretary of the UREC for consideration.

**There are significant ethical issues which require further guidance**

Signature Chair of Research Institute Ethics Committee/Panel:

Date:

*This form together with the recommendation and a copy of the research proposal should then be submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee*

## Appendix 4

### Finding the space for communion

Reflection January 2009

Part of my role as faculty supporting practice involves auditing clinical sites as suitable for practice placement for student nurses. While undertaking an audit at the local hospice, a discussion took place in relation to nursing people of a different culture. Reference was made to the Communication Strategy (2008) which identified the needs of service users and providers from different backgrounds.

In order to meet the this strategy a steering group was formed to explore cultural competence with the overall aim to

demonstrate and promote the concept of cultural competence to patients / residents, staff, volunteers and service users within Milford Care Centre, in order that the organisation is a culturally competence workplace for staff and delivers culturally competence services to patients and their families.

We mentioned cultural work which involved colleagues at the university (Tuohy *et al.* 2008) and offered to help in any way that was considered appropriate. I was invited to join the next meeting, where clarity was given regarding the priority of the group to have a designated space, a 'Multi-denominational room' for staff and patients to practice their faith with an emphasis on spirituality. The group said that they were not really clear about the environment of the room or its activities and the title did not convey for them what the room was about. There was a concern that it would be hard to advocate to find such a space. I discovered that some of the team had never been to the university despite being neighbours. I suggested that a similar room at the university was called the contemplative centre.<sup>372</sup> I offered to liaise with the Chaplin and after Christmas

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<sup>372</sup> According to the website the contemplative centre is a quiet oasis located opposite the Student Union, open throughout the day and offers a space for prayer or reflection or an escape from the campus hub-bub. Worship takes place usually in the contemplative space shared by different faith communities in the College.

arrange a visit and have our next meeting at the university. Rather than talk about the centre I felt that seeing and experiencing the centre could offer a distinctive perspective.

In the New Year I walked across the bridge on a bitterly cold grey winter day to meet with the working group team from the hospice. The easterly winds howled as I escaped from the office, abandoning the harsh glow of a florescent computer screen awash with emails awaiting a response. Several people at the department returned from break, tired and many had succumbed to viral illness. Everybody was playing catch up as the impact of postponed meetings felt by all the team.

Walking towards the courtyard home to the student centre, I am reminded of a wish by a former senior academic, encouraging us, to take time to pause and enjoy the panorama view as we walk across the bridge. It is good to keep these thoughts to the forefront in my mind and enjoy the moment and I feel my body become less numb as I begin to look forward to the meeting.

As we walk through the door of the contemplative centre, away from the bitter wind my eyes became accustomed to the variation in light moving from stark grey to the aura of diffused light within.

I enter through the beautiful bog oak structures by artist Fergus Costello<sup>373</sup> representing the four elements of earth, wind, fire and water acting as a wrap, inviting me to enter a womb like space.

Silence fills the room as we gathered ourselves to meet. Then softly the whisper of voices permeates the space as we begin our introductions.

We sat in a circle with the Chaplin shared a little of the design, history and the commitment of UL to protecting this space. He explained how different faiths have used the centre for services, marriage ceremonies and prayer during Ramadan. At the contemplative centre, our department has celebrated the life of a colleague who died tragically and the retirement of another colleague who wished to offer prayers and good wishes for our future as a going away gift.

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<sup>373</sup> liturgical artist and church designer



The quiet reverence of the voices, reminded me of plain chant. Gradually I notice gentle background music filtering through the air. The illuminated stained glass window filters a soft glow denying those within the room a view of the world outside.

I have been to this room several times but this occasion was different. I sense an awareness of something special unfolding. Following the quietude very slowly the dialogue begins. Words like beautiful, amazing, eyes drift and look around, up and back again.

A therapist says how the centre has a sense of calmness for mind, body and spirit. I too felt the calmness as though enveloped in a cocoon.

A nurse comments on the usefulness of the ability to control the lighting and notes that the art work is so inclusive rather than a sterile functional room devoid of expression.

Another draws attention to the bog oak and the possibility of using the elements of earth, air, fire and water.

A member of the pastoral care team asks about the colour on the walls and we discuss how inviting such a room would be for a child – gentle rather than dark and intimidating for people searching for solace.

I witness the scene. I feel a connection towards these caring colleagues.

I sense personal peace and calm in a haven, a spiritual environment, and for me the space was of a therapeutic nature a reprieve from the continuous demands and pressure.

One of the visitors remarks on the beauty of the place and how it feels good to be here. I felt that there was a reverence and dignity towards the need to advocate for a space like this for colleagues and patients at the hospice. The

lived reality of the mission statement and the commitment to nurturing and supporting staff and patients was tangible.

I have witnessed the development of the hospice team through my faculty support role in the process of accreditation as a nursing development unit, later in becoming the first hospice facility in Ireland to receive the quality award by IHSAB. I also have an appreciation the Hospice was founded and resourced by a voluntary organisation with a catholic ethos,<sup>374</sup> to a broader commitment embracing inclusivity, acknowledging the diversity of the work community through sensitive collaboration. It is always renewing and grounding to listen to the beliefs and values of the staff.

For me there was a sense of presence of close relationship a communion of kindred spirits. As we left the contemplative centre, we were invited to *Teach Faighté* next door for coffee and further discussion. We talk a little more about spirituality and the hospice team expressed the possibility of a vision beyond a mere 'multi-denominational room'. For me the shift offered a buffer moving from peaceful to the more usual hustle and bustle of everyday life. Outside Tuesday's farmers market continues, everyday life continues nothing has changed and everything has changed.

It is the first time I was consciously aware of the relationship between art and contemplation. The question that engaged me - what is contemplation and how do philosophers and contemplatives drawing upon monastic and eastern cultures use the arts to illuminate such understandings? The use of age old words like sanctuary and spirituality may have different meanings in modern society. Skorpen *et al.* (2008) writing within a Norwegian context, draw upon Foucault, argue that creating atmospheric spaces for individuals for social

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<sup>374</sup> We are committed to making visible the healing presence of Jesus in the midst of human suffering through prayer, compassion and solidarity.

practices rather than mere functionality imbues that space with meaning beyond language, communication and interaction.

The use of the art enthralled me especially as the discussion started with the idea of using the four elements. Last week I found this poem while searching to understand the interpretation of the elements and explore the inclusive nature of their use and the possible association to a caring spiritual dimension to nursing. Somehow I think that this Haiku will be a useful tool to guide my writing

ELEMENTAL: Haikus (Philemon, 1998)<sup>375</sup>.

The four elements:

Fire, earth, air and water.

Let them be your guides.

**FIRE**

Singed by light and fire?

Like a moth drawn to the flame?

Then let the past burn.

Craving heat and warmth?

Fleeing from winter's cold?

Wrap Yourself in blankets.

**EARTH**

Hemmed in by steep walls?

Locked doors? Wait.

Look toward the roof.

There is a ladder.

Buried underground?

Weighted down by life's demands?

Dig roots into soil.

**AIR**

Scattered by the wind?

Let yourself be blown apart.

You will become whole.

Flying far too high?

Lost sight of the earth?

Glide on.

Wing your way toward God.

**WATER**

Battling with fog?

Do not resist.

Cling to the Ground or soar above.

Dragged underwater?

Sink deep. Surrender to grief. You will rise again.

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<sup>375</sup> Poetry web site [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2009]

The notion of connecting the mind body and spirit is seen as critical within human caring. Within nursing literature the idea of spirituality as a dimension, unifying the bio psycho social aspects of nursing has been raised. This is exemplified in the evangelical style and wisdom of Jean Watson. *A Caring Moment* (Watson 2008) highlights the fundamental 'connection through the 'sacred caring work of nursing'. Recent work by Mc Sherry *et al.* (2008) drew my attention to student nurses' views of spirituality as an existential process which was described as having 'meaning, purpose and fulfilment' and found in all people.

Do I[we] pay attention to the education of students around spirituality? The Nursing and Midwifery Council requires students to be skilled in meeting the spiritual needs of patients. All through nursing history reference to spiritual care and religion were interlinked (Narayanasamy 1999). Caution is offered by Greenstreet (1999) regarding the common error of equating spirituality and religion. In particular Irish nurse education has been traditionally influenced by a predominantly catholic view and perhaps it is now critical that possibilities are explored to broaden understandings of the term spirituality to embrace a wider service need.

Baldacchino (2006) found that the complexity underpinning spiritual care required greater attention within health education. How is spirituality addressed in the curriculum and how do students see spirituality? A domain of care is very much at the heart of the art of nursing. For nurses to address the spiritual care needs of patients requires opportunities to explore students' own appreciation of spirituality (Greenstreet 1999). Strategies to support such development require student centred experiential learning activities. Would students benefit from visiting such places or sanctuary as an individual or can we open the doors for them without invading individual choices and is it appropriate to do so?.

I wonder at the possible therapeutic benefit for my colleagues at the hospice. WHO (2002) describes spiritual care as a critical element of palliative care and hence facilities to support staff in their work are important. I understand that there is increasing pressure on service in these days of fiscal rectitude. Opportunities to help carers in supporting the spiritual dimension to hospice care are intended to be helpful but of course may not be necessary.

At the Nurse Education Forum, the Government of Ireland (2000) strategically outlined the role of third level teaching staff in clinical learning in the BSc Nursing programmes. Reference was made to the supervision of students, liaison and communication with the third level institution and the clinical site. There was also an acknowledgement that creative models and individual arrangements may evolve within the partnership structures.

Our department has addressed this requirement encouraging 'a range of methodologies' which allow for flexibility and innovation bearing in mind the geographical spread over numerous sites. Our approach aims to 'foster the educational and practice links between the department and relevant practice placement sites and to provide educational support to students.'<sup>376</sup> I have negotiated my role in this regard and been given the opportunity to be flexible, autonomous, responding to service needs at the hospice. Maria<sup>377</sup> and I have engaged in guiding reflective practice with nurses at the hospice (Bailey and Graham 2007) and disseminated some of the work at conferences. I feel that this activity has value and is a meaningful way of engaging and supporting practice.

I believe that the strategic nature of this work is more effective than planning to go to a site, find the student is either not available or engaged in more purposeful activity with a preceptor. I see that the interface between student,

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<sup>376</sup> Framework for the Role of Faculty in Supporting Clinical Sites

<sup>377</sup> Maria Bailey Education officer

patient, preceptor and cpc<sup>378</sup> is critical in the achievement of competencies rather than a meet and greet session. While I value meeting and talking with students I am uncertain regarding the effectiveness of such activities and perhaps greater debate needs to occur as to how best approach the role.

I believe that my work at the hospice may have influence in supporting practitioners in reaching individual and organisational goals in the quality of patient care. Faculty supporting practice is an honorary role and not to be confused within the domain of a joint appointment or the clinical credibility of lecturer which are different concepts.

It was the experience that gave me the opportunity to convey in the modern sense of sanctuary or peace in the contemplative centre. I could see the softening of the faces of those around me, noted by the calm voices, the awareness of the impressions that came from the questions. I feel that we co created a space that allowed a fusion of ideas.

One comment comes to mind – ‘now I have strong idea of the possibilities of the space at the hospice. This has helped me appreciate the possibilities’.

The place can be contemplative, can be inclusive and yet not sterile or devoid of atmosphere and spirituality. The respect that such an inclusive room would be given would thus ensure that it is kept exclusively for the purpose for which it is intended and not become a general meeting room.

The contemplative centre is a place with four walls, a roof and fundamentally for me the presence of the carers created what I feel was a communion of kindred spirits.

The approach understanding and insight of the Chaplin hugely contributed to the creation of the moment. The people that came to share the space on a cold January day highlighted that seeing and experiencing the atmosphere is of the essence. Far better than a mere discussion or photographic imagery? Skorpen *et al.* (2008) argue that spatial areas, locality, experience and impressions will always influence social interaction. The meeting that took place is thus

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<sup>378</sup> clinical placement coordinator

contextualised within the meaning that was ascribed by the participants in that time and place.

On that day, did I really want to go there on a cold day, leaving the warmth of the office as I went for my coat my first thought was; why did I do this? I am so busy.

To see hear and experience.

This short interlude was serene, a precious time offering me space to be still and an opportunity to reflect and ultimately (re)confirm my beliefs surrounding the role of faculty supporting practice. The sanctuary within the contemplative space is now available within my repertoire of caring activities in supporting my work as an educator. The meeting took several emails and some time to organise.

Finally a brief and welcome email from one of the team at the hospice

*Dear Margaret*

*My thanks to you & your two colleagues for your time last Thursday*

*We were greatly inspired by our visit. We plan to focus our efforts in the near future on securing an appropriate space for the staff and patients of the Hospice*

*I will keep you posted on our progress*

*Thank you again,*

Thought provoking ideas and possibilities:

Spiritual education within curriculum and fit for purpose

Role of faculty supporting practice discussion with Department and service providers

Support for students in practice what would they would find valuable?

Caring for self and time management

What would I do differently?

## **Appendix 5**

### **Time for feedback or feed-forward After Race (2010)**

Reflection July 2010

My journal writing began with

Frustration

Frustration

FRUSTRATION

Exasperation

Words like

I don't have time

This is incredulous.

Why don't they read the guidelines? 4<sup>th</sup> years have completed a final year project. Don't they know how to reference

What a poor understanding some students have of REFLECTION

What are we asking them to do?

Do academics ask students to reflect?

Do academics believe in the value of reflection?

It is not an easy concept

Do we walk the walk?

Do I walk the walk?

How then will students be able to pass the assignment? Seven students presented reflective practice assignment work that did not meet the criteria for a successful pass. And then some thoughts, shifting away from individual students to learning and giving feedback within a task centred approach.



My writing was beginning to read like an essay on feedback for any student's written work. This quasi writing on assignment feedback was devoid of context of meaning and for me sterile, somewhere my beliefs were submerged.

I included no representation of the student as an individual person writing a reflective practice assignment. Initially, I failed to consider the challenges for undergraduate students in grasping reflective writing and the competing demands in their busy lives. Fourth year students are undertaking level 4 competencies during a 36 week internship, aiming to be eligible to present to exam boards in September.

It dawns some of these students may have other repeat projects. Later confirmation an excel sheet listing F grades. I do not consider how students may react to a fail. How was I going to give consideration to managing feedback with these students?

What is an efficient way of handling this situation?

Sometimes we engage with students.

Sometimes we distance ourselves from the individual in the name of objectivity.

Time a huge factor, concern, rather than a fear that feedback would not be meaningful. Students unable to hear the message. As a consequence, perhaps unable to redo and resubmit. Memories of receiving feedback for my first essay in my undergraduate degree.

And the anger and hurt and being unable to hear the message to move forward.

I try to prepare a feedback comment sheet. My heart is not in the task. I slowly begin to attend to my beliefs about student learning and a sense of discomfort, my thoughts do not rest easy with me. I struggled to focus, the influences grid might be valuable in exploring the factors that inform my experience and reflection and decision making in managing communication with these students.

### **Time /priorities**

Over 120 assignments were submitted in late June and it takes time to grade and moderate the work. A colleague's help with moderation was critical. It takes time to collate results. In planning for this eventuality I had factored in and negotiated a repeat opportunity for August 30. The logistics and communication process of informing these students of their results seem time consuming and frustrating.

I believed that students need time to organise to receive feedback and subsequently prepare the repeat assignment in an informed manner. There seems little more that I can do assist my time management in planning the module. In trying to manage my time, I consider holding a group tutorial session the following week.

But do students want to come together and hear feedback. Suddenly, an appreciation a heightened awareness that these students are also fourth years have dual status and work shifts. The planning of this feedback session(s) will take some thought. Group feedback -Is this not a breach of confidentiality putting all 'fails' together.<sup>379</sup> It might be efficient but will by its very nature be general rather than specific and individual to each student needs. What is useful rather than what is politically correct? A constancy of wondering. Will I meet the students' face to face or electronic communication? Won't I...

### **Negative attitude**

Meanwhile the corridors are empty and part of me is resentful of the time demands associated with this module. Much of the work extends outside normal semester time. There is talk of holidays

When are you finishing

When are going a frequent topic of conversation

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<sup>379</sup> Later I notice 'my trip' and correct myself - students who have failed an assignment.

But for me if I give feedback serious consideration there is a significant time element, an excuse to hide behind.

### **Wrapped up in self-concern? pity? stressed? guilt?**

My attendance at the 16<sup>th</sup> international reflective practice conference had stimulated my thinking, motivated me to read and spend time on my research work. I wanted to finish up my 'tasks'. Free myself and put energy towards critical reading and thinking which urgently needs to happen.

Were the guidelines presented in an confusing academic language that offered little clarity for some students and how could I improve them. Later, I realise that over 100 students interpreted these correctly. But these students need to know how to improve the assignment. It seems easier to send an email with general feedback comments. It might be simple and efficient to send an e mail with resubmission details and an attachment indicating general comments and a date for a tutorial. But a little distance from meeting students that might be angry and shocked

### **Emotional entanglement / over identification**

I recall memories of receiving feedback for my first essay during my undergraduate degree. The anger and hurt and being unable to hear the few lines starkly scrawled across the page '*needs to develop academic writing style*' Feedback led to me questioning my ability to be on the degree programme and my confidence took a dive deep to my boots. This dip led to days of being unable to even begin to 'fix' the assignment and learn through the process. Later memories of feedback from one of my guided supervision sessions led to a realisation that on return home-I had added 24 comments. For me, attempts at trying to capture everything in my text and how to make sense of feedback was a struggle.

The literature supports the idea that feedback needs a thoughtful approach.

### **Expectations for others: Need to feel valued?**

A concern that the work that does not merit a pass will give students a negative experience of reflective practice and dare I speak the unspoken for *me* as a lecturer a negative perception. A defensive question and the possibility of sanction, if students complained afterwards regarding limited access and availability of feedback what would be said.

### **Expectations from self about 'how I should act' Doing what was felt to be right**

Am I being true to my values of being genuine and respectful with students? How does this relate to my previous experience of receiving feedback? I wonder about the effectiveness of giving and receiving feedback. How do I know it's useful? I dialogue with self and myself and my time management. What would I like myself? *In sotto voce*

Reflective practice is revealing and vulnerable work. I engage in the process in a very secure compassionate environment. I too need to walk the talk and be supportive of students. How can I support these students? I sense an understanding of how to meet these individual student needs

### **Misplaced concern-loyalty to colleagues versus loyalty to patient (student)?**

#### **Anxious about ensuing conflict<sup>380</sup>**

Initially my thoughts centred on a concern about meeting with students that might be angry and frustrated. While this was a possibility it is important that students moved to understanding how to improve the work.

I considered and spent some time twisting dabbling and moving from what was simple efficient and what was meaningful and what I understand as effective and what rings true for me. I can handle this tension.

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<sup>380</sup> Not quite sure how to explore collegial aspect

### **Knowledge to act in specific ways? the weight of theory**

Feedback is identified as one of the 7 factors influencing successful learning<sup>381</sup>  
Most importantly feedback closely 'interacts' across the learning continuum  
(Race 2010 p 105)

Feedback needs to be given to a student in a manner which enhances, rather than damages their self-esteem, confidence and informs future learning .It is an activity that strengthens students capacity to self-regulate their own performance (Nicol and Macfarlane- Dick 2006) and an important skill that is seldom taught (Carless 2006).

It has been 5 years since I thought about feedback in a purposeful way while attending a workshop at the college by the centre for teaching and learning.

The literature abounds with details of good feedback but there is little specifically moving from the principles<sup>382</sup> to the process of managing these approaches in a forward thinking student centred manner. Race's (2010) text becomes a source, a starting point to inform my thinking.

Nor is there detailed attention to the vulnerable student who has experienced failure. My thoughts are reinforced by Race (2010) who cites Peelo's argument that failure at university is a difficulty for students but part of educational life. It can be experienced in isolation when a student thinks they are the only student who has been unsuccessful. Failure for an assignment may be viewed by the student as 'falling below their own personal standards and may lead to huge pressure' (Race 2010, p.106).

For feedback to be effective it must be understood and requires sensitive dialogue. While there are guidelines and suggestions how feedback can be structured and managed consideration needs to be given to the reality of the student experience in keeping with findings in the literature.

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<sup>381</sup> Wanting to learn, taking ownership of the need to learn, learning by doing, learning through feedback, making sense of what has been learned, explaining or teaching or coaching, making informed judgement (Race 2010 p.viii)

<sup>382</sup> Timely, prompt, positive as well as negative, constructive and specific (Morss & Murray2005)

### **Conforming to normal practice/ habit? The weight of tradition**

I feel that this is critical to consider the literature within the context of my practice. I sense that my approach to giving feedback had become a habitual practice. The possibility of it becoming a routine for me and yet the significance for an individual student is anything but routine.

There is an up and coming tendency for teachers to give electronic feedback on assignments. I have experimented with various types. How easy to insert in 'text annotation' comments, different colours, queries and questions and or footnotes (Ball 2010). How useful are these for students? Can there be a balance? Another initiative, the development of feedback sheets using criteria that give general feedback to all students in an overall summary, mentioning typical problem areas

Sometimes when I have used such approaches the comments are so general and trite. Has this action the potential to distance the writer and the writing?

Is there an emphasis on the outcome and fulfilment of a quality requirement? Frequent references appear in the literature regarding student dissatisfaction with feedback (Carless 2006). So I decline

- to give a general feedback in annotated format.

- to hold face to face to groups

- to hold an open tutorial

I feel that these students will benefit from an opportunity to meet face to face on an individual basis. These students are on clinical placements, sometimes are slow to access college email. I wanted to give them as much time as possible to make arrangements around work demands. What to do?

### **Limited skills/discomfort/ confidence to act in new ways**

The process of working through the influences grid kept me mindful of the tension between time constraints and doing the right thing efficiency v effectiveness.

The decision. Opportunities for dialogue between students and myself. A decision informed by reading Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006).

Help with administration to send a Friday Web text to the 7 students requesting them to check their college emails. The email mentions<sup>383</sup> an invitation to

*Come and meet with me for feedback*

*Discuss on the phone*

*Forward a time and date (within given identified days)*

*Reminder of the resubmission opportunity*

*Give a contact number*

How does this fit in with student kind learning?

I am interested in the idea that term feedback disempowers students as seen as a passive term with connotations of spoon feeding, an interesting point raised by Ball (2010). I am aware that I cannot pass the assignment for them. I can create an opportunity for time for the student to consider their work and encourage them towards submitting the work to be awarded a pass.

The notion that feedback is a critical part of adult learning and the ideas within the literature surrounding self-regulation (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006) and empowerment and student autonomy (Parboteeah Anwar 2009) have resonance for me within the boundaries of an educational approach that prepares students for a professional role. Such ideas require greater attention and dialogue in enhancing my development.

### **Connecting being authentic**

Was I exaggerating my concerns that students might be distressed, confused and hurt ? No.

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<sup>383</sup> The language and the email are part of further work informed by Race's comments

Were students upset Yes

Were there tears? Yes

Were reactions one of disbelief? Yes

Was their confusion as to how to fix it? Yes

Did students hear the feedback? yet to be determined.

Were there questions and engagement with the dialogue? Yes

Students said

*Appreciated you [Mg] taking the time*

*Glad to meet*

*Liked the individual face to face*

Race (2010) acknowledges that face to face individual feedback can be personal, intimate and can address individual student strengths and weaknesses but there are some disadvantages. Namely time consuming and can be time wasting if students don't turn up and students become defensive and can be threatening. While Race does not say for whom – I suggest for both parties. The decision for me to meet, I can now say was the right one in accord with my beliefs and values.

Bradbury-Jones *et al.* (2010) examined student nurses experiences of empowerment in clinical placement, report the benefit in the empowering experience of being 'treated with respect as a human being'. I need to be grounded in findings like this and read more in relation to social and political forces influencing nurse education.

I have encouraged students to email me with any queries.

We will see, in the Autumn, if 7 students are able to present to the graduating exam boards having learnt from the feed-forward process of reworking the



assignment. I went all around the world and came back to my beliefs and values and the use of the influences grid in my decision making.

The possibilities and the power of the influences grid is succinctly expressed by Johns (2006 p.45) 'Influencing factors can be deeply embodied in our psyche and not easily accessed for scrutiny' and cites Nagapriya's words, connecting to this notion of self-revelation

Fundamentally we create our own world and don't realise how much our own prejudices, desires and habits distort our experiences of it; we see the world in terms of our selves

Time for feedback and dialogue for feed-forward is critical to student kind learning in using the 7 principles of student feedback. It is a process that presents challenges 'time, miscommunication and emotional barriers' (Carless 2010p 220) Feed forward aimed to be supportive expressing student kind to these seven individual students.

Feedback is worthy of consideration within nurse education, as it exerts influence on future student performance and confidence.

### **Thoughts**

- How could I have thought of any other way to do this?
- Time and tide wait for no man.
- The time management was easier than I thought and took at least 30 minutes with each student in addition to preparatory work
- Further exploration of the tensions within *language* used in communication with students regarding success and fail and the inherent power relations – 'unfortunately, resubmit...' <sup>384</sup> ( Race 2010 and Carless 2006)
- Opportunities to discuss feedback developments within the department
- The value of the Influences grid

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<sup>384</sup> I used the word unfortunately and Race cautions against such a 'bad news word' p124 and terms this as power language

I never felt anxious or stressed working through this process prior to meeting with students. While I was aware that I was uncomfortable about my thoughts related to electronic feedback I was not honest in revealing of myself until actively concentrating and using the grid. I am now more aware of these cues in an integrated way of thinking about my daily work. I question myself about using the influences grid in a linear way and how this shapes the reflective flow.

Perhaps greater attention to the cues will lead to a more creative style in reconstructing experience

- Feedback from students indicated that it was valuable
- Feedback and power relations between students and teachers
- Reflective writing processes a forthcoming reflection
- Concerns regarding reflective practice in student education

Fundamental to empowerment within critical social theory is the education of students through liberation in a critique of existing world views towards transforming practice. Money and Nolan (2006) in critiquing Freire's work write of humanisation. They raise the idea of student nurses becoming accountable ethical practitioners through active engagement in reflection an ongoing challenge in nurse education.

The question what are the reflective skills development processes for these students??

Attention needs to be paid to this theme within the curriculum and how it is realised. Must plan my personal campaign autumn 2010.

## Appendix 6

### Narrative editing examples

Original	Edited
It is significantly to	Significantly
I say to:	MG
Details of her family	family
The bed clothes	bedclothes
..reflection    transformation    will concentrate on	to concentrating
Glad we decorated the room with candles	brought candles
Here it states that	stating
Devoid of expression	expressionless
story about the quiet student	quiet student story
Initially, random ways influenced this approach	this approach has been random
Things have changed as to how I do things.	How I do things has changed

## Appendix 7

### Captain of my destiny

Many springs come and go  
Since beginning this journey of wonder and privilege  
Learning and creating a reflective space to dialogue  
Learning to be mindful poised in the midst of overwhelming darkness

Meeting on work load  
Metrics  
Dire financial straits  
Objectifying individual contribution  
Ranking, scoring, classifying  
A race to perdition  
No mention of time with students  
Developing attributes  
Without generating research money there is no value

Tossed and turned on an ocean  
Dark nights of the soul  
Where is our vision  
watch colleagues tired weary, despondent  
Individualism dominates

I could be me but for  
Guided reflection  
I am the master of my soul  
In a compass of being and becoming student kind  
Caring compassion takes courage  
Force tradition and embodiment everywhere  
Understanding naming these forces is empowering

In the midst of overwhelming concerns  
Worries about chapter 4  
Mitigating circumstances  
Searching for paper work  
Each form has a number  
Records<sup>385</sup>  
Seems so juvenile  
Rules and more rules  
Defensive protecting whom  
Understand the why  
Now, I get a sense of what this means for students

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<sup>385</sup> Application for a 3 month extension for thesis submission

Humbling  
Cross the riptide  
Dark nights of the soul

Okri says dwell with the confusion  
Struggle to revision chapter 4  
Dwell in dialogue  
Mindfully finding a  
Sea of tranquillity  
I watch my self-detached  
Unconnected  
Dust myself off  
Ryan air here I come  
Again and again

Begin again  
Master of my soul  
Reconnected  
Have a conversation  
A word from on high Can you write a position paper on reflective practice

(After a Guinness advertisement)

## Appendix 8

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